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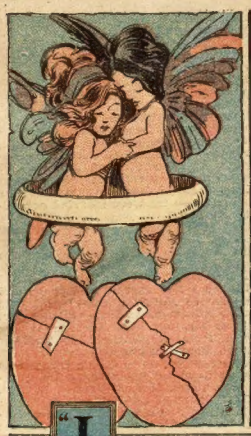
A Mock Marriage;

Or, LOVE'S IDIOSYNCRASIES

By ELLA MARTIN



"I didn't want the one I had, and I couldn't have the one I wanted." . . .

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CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND SON.

IN ONE of the mansions on Michigan boulevard, between Thirty-second and Thirty-third streets, one of the most exclusive residential blocks in the city of Chicago, the main scenes of this drama were enacted—a fitting place for events such as this story discloses; for has not this extremely fashionable locality furnished newspaperdom with numerous tales of comedy, romance, and tragedy? However, we concern ourselves with incidents the newspapers have never discovered.

In the private study of this particular stately home, two men, father and son, were seated in earnest conversation. The elder, Mr. Alden, a retired broker and semi-invalid, was relating his financial difficulties with a view to finding a solution for them. Up to this time he had hidden from Glen, his only son, his insolvency; but now that he saw a way out of his troubles through that son's agency, he no longer hesitated to take him into his confidence.

"I am to understand," remarked Glen Alden, after his father had ceased speaking, "that we are utterly penniless?"

"If our debts were paid we would not own a dollar. It is the old story, my son—speculation. But it was ill luck, not lack of judgment, that has brought me where I am."

"And Fern—does she know?"

"No. What use to tell her? Do you know what it would mean to her? I know Fern, she is like her mother was; she is a butterfly when there's no call to be anything else, but once she knew that all the luxury she is accustomed to is only a sham, that everything is mortgaged to its utmost value, she would sacrifice her place in society and seek a career for herself. Time and again she has told me she could be self-supporting if need be."

"She is very accomplished," said Glen, faintly, "but what could she do if obliged to make a living?"

He drew his serious brown eyes away from his parent's face and regarded vacancy for a moment.

Glen Alden was a serious-minded youth, but he was not an overly thoughtful one. He let the problems he considered too deep for him go unsolved, while he simply drifted and enjoyed life in a quiet way. Hitherto he had had no need to exert himself, and he knew no more than did his friends of what sort of stuff he was made. He was scarcely more than twenty-three, and was tall, handsome, and beardless. In point of experience he was as unfitted to cope with the world as his sister, though adapted, by education and travel, added to natural endowments, to be a gentleman. He did not fear for himself, however, though recognizing this fact, but for his sister, Fern, the idol of his heart. For no woman, since his mother's death, had measured up to Fern's standard in his estimation. She was his companion and adviser; and she mothered him in a way that made him seem the younger, though Fern was only twenty.

A lump rose in his throat when he contemplated the possibility of his dainty, vivacious sister being forced to face the world in a struggle for existence—a drudge in the world of labor. Through the haze which had enveloped his intellect, obscuring present things while his imagination was outlining picture negatives, that, perchance, the future might develop, his father's voice came to him as if from afar.

"Would you see Fern a paid assistant in some business man's office, or perhaps a governess in a home where she has hitherto been welcomed as a guest?"

The young man looked at his father in a startled manner, a premonition of what was to be required of him forcing itself upon him in a vague sort of way.

"Command me," he said. "You know, father, I owe everything to you—my existence, my education, even my support for the past twenty-three years."

"That was but your due," interrupted Mr. Alden. "I am responsible for your existence, and until you were qualified for self-support my duty was to maintain you. My greatest fear lately has been that I had not fitted you to be self-supporting, not having educated you for any particular business career. Your education has been general, your aims desultory. I expected to leave you wealth enough to preclude the need of any business occupation. But I have failed utterly."

"It is not too late yet," Glen said, eagerly, hoping to escape the sacrifice his intuition told him was to be required of him. "I can fit myself for some vocation easily."

"Not in time to save me from acknowledged poverty," his father replied sadly, "or your old home—the place where you and Fern were born, and where your mother died—from the auctioneer's hammer."

Glen sank back in his chair with a suppressed sigh, his eager hopefulness gone almost as soon as it was given birth.

"I will do your bidding, whatever it is," he said, resignedly, for he knew his parent had unbosomed himself of his troubles because he sought his aid. He determined to acquiesce to his wishes, whatever they might be, without further parley. But from that moment a grimness settled over him, the effects of which never entirely disappeared from his disposition. Something of his care-free boyhood died within him in that moment. It was the first trial that had ever come to him, and he felt his own helplessness at the very time strength was needed. There comes a time in the life of the average man when he must rouse from his adolescence as from a pleasant dream, and rise to the duties manhood requires of him, but he can never go back, either in feeling or in years, to the other side of the Rubicon.

The old man noticed the change in his son and bowed his head. In years, perhaps, Mr. Alden need not be called old.

But ill health and business cares had seamed his brow and whitened his hair. Moreover, he had less strength of character than formerly, and therefore was, because of his helplessness, willing to take advantage of means that he once would have scorned to consider, if by so doing he might continue to maintain a semblance of prosperity.

"My son," he said, raising his gray head and fixing his keen blue eyes upon the young man's face, "what I am going to ask of you is not so strange a request as you seem to think. Fathers have exacted it of their sons before now, that they might save themselves from financial ruin. It is nothing new for a son to sacrifice himself for the father who has given him everything heart could wish, while he had it to give. You surely would not see us all crushed under the weight of poverty and social ostracism?"

"Father," said Glen Alden, almost impatiently, "let me know at once what is required of me. I am ready to help you. Tell me how I can aid you."

"Sit down, Glen," for he had involuntarily risen from his chair, "and I will try to explain the situation to you. We are ruined if we do not accept the terms offered us by a one-time friend of mine."

"And the terms?" breathlessly, "what are they?"

"I must tell you in my own way, Glen."

"Very well, father," replied the young man, seating himself and leaning back leisurely, that his parent might not notice the impatience he found it hard to conceal.

"I must go back to my boyhood, that you may be able to understand. I was very young, much younger than you are, when I fell in love with a rustic beauty. She was a person of excellent qualities, but of a station in life far below my own. We parted eventually, but remained friends. Later, I met and loved your mother, and easily forgot my early love. She married in her own sphere and lived in poverty many years; then just before his death her husband inherited a large fortune. My one-time humble sweetheart now handles enormous wealth, and it has changed her attitude entirely. For her children's sake she is ambitious. She has come to Chicago to storm the social world. I have had an interview with her—she has come to my rescue."

Glen Alden rose to his feet with excitement and a suddenness that nearly upset his chair.

"And you would accept a loan from this woman—the woman you renounced because of her poverty and lack of social position! You, my once proud father!"

"No, no! You have not guessed it. She has not offered a loan. There will be nothing to pay back. I would never be able to do that now—at my age."

"A gift? Impossible!"

"Hear me out, Glen. I will make it all plain to you. It is not a gift, for the lady will receive full value—in her eyes, at least. But Glen, I did not renounce her for any reason whatever. We quarreled, that is all. In fact, she preferred another. You will not fail me, Glen? You will not fail your old father?"

Glen resumed his seat. He was outwardly calm, but he was growing irritable with the suspense.

"This woman, Mrs. Bennett, has a young and beautiful daughter, named Lillith," resumed Mr. Alden.

Glen's heart sank like a piece of lead in his bosom. Something of the real truth began to dawn upon him.

"When you see Miss Bennett you will be impressed with her at once. She is fair, intelligent, womanly."

Glen's lips drew themselves together in a straight line.

"She is a woman any man might be proud to introduce as his wife."

"Ah, I see!" breathed the young man. "And is she so anxious to shine in society that she is willing to wed with a stranger?"

He was well aware now what was required of him, and he did not pretend ignorance. His quick understanding of the situation helped his father out.

"You misjudge her. She is ignorant of your very existence, and knows nothing of the conspiracy between her mother and myself."

He laughed at the word "conspiracy" and continued.

"The case is this: Mrs. Bennett has never had the entree of the social world. She is a lady, but is what is called the 'newly-rich.' She is desirous of launching her daughter into the world of fashion and refinement."

"Why not turn her over to Mrs. Potter Palmer?" asked Glen, sarcastically. "I am no Ward McAllister. Or, better still, marry the mother yourself."

"I tried that, my boy. But she laughed in my face. It is not herself she is thinking of now. Still, she is young enough to care for social honors. But it was her wish to settle her daughter advantageously that influenced her to make this offer. She mistrusted my predicament when I sought to renew the old relations, and made the proposition herself. I fancy she was rather glad of the chance to refuse me. However, she suggested that we mate our children, and thus make things as right between us as they ever could be now."

Glen felt instinctively that there were some things that he was keeping hidden in the background, but he felt no curiosity to know more of his father's past life.

"Father," he said, pleadingly, "I am only twenty-three—little more than a boy, and I have never known the tender passion. How can I marry this girl?"

"All the better my son. If you have never loved elsewhere, you will find it easy to fall in love with the fair and gentle Lillith Bennett. Had you already formed an attachment, it would be harder for you to accede to my request."

"Yes," Glen said, dreamily. "I imagine so. Well, father, I will not refuse to help you in this, since it means so much to us all, but I must make my own terms. I don't believe in marrying without love, for any reason whatever, but if Miss Bennett is willing to go through the marriage ceremony merely to gain the position in society a union with me will give her, I can surely do so for the sake of saving my father from a poverty-stricken old age. And I cannot help thinking that my motive is the more commendable. I will obey you, and I make only one stipulation—that you give me a business commission, a sham or a real one, that will take me abroad directly after the wedding for an indefinite period of time. After a while matters may adjust themselves. The fair bride, feeling herself neglected, may want a divorce on the ground of desertion."

This brought Mr. Alden to his feet with more alacrity than he had shown for a number of years. His limbs trembled beneath him. Glen could see that he was greatly agitated.

"Don't dream of such a thing!" he cried. "Never harbor the thought for a moment! Divorce is the Devil's invention. You remember what your mother used to say—that all the good was from God and all the evil from the Devil, and divorce is always an evil. Besides, there is no call for anything like that. Lillith Bennett is a lovable girl, and one any man might be proud of."

"That is not the point," said Glen, decisively. "I shall marry for love when I marry; meanwhile, I am willing to be Miss Bennett's husband, in name only, till she can secure the position she covets. Then she will have no further need of me."

"It is not the position of divorcee that Mrs. Bennett desires to procure for her daughter. And you, my son, would not care to disgrace yourself and family by being divorced from a woman who is worthy of you in every way."

"It would not be in reality a divorce such as two people seek because they cannot agree; it would simply be annulling a mere form of marriage. But don't worry, father; for unless Miss Bennett desires it, it is not likely to come to that. I shall not waive my freedom unless I fall in love, which may never happen. I shall prove immune, I fancy, to the disease called love."

Bravely said at twenty-three. If Glen had known how very soon he was to meet one who would set his heartstrings to vibrating! But when that happened it was too late. The sly god of love lies ever in wait for boys of twenty-three, or thereabouts, and eventually he finds a chance to send his arrow home. It may be that first love is not the strongest, unless it is the one and only love of a lifetime, but it has a freshness about it, a glamour no other love imparts.

Long Mr. Alden and his son sat there talking, and finally it was all settled. There were concessions on both sides, and more explanations on the father's part. When they parted for the night the old man was satisfied, and the young man resigned, but full of a grim determination, such as he had never experienced before. A determination to stick to the terms he had made, and never to allow himself to succumb to the tender passion, since he should be a married man, though wedded where his heart was not involved.

He would permit this woman who craved social position to bear his name as long as she should desire its protection and influence for his father's sake. As for himself—well, he would go and hunt elephants in Africa, or do something else equally engaging. And some day, perhaps, his bride-to-be would fall in love with another and demand her freedom, and he, too, would be free again. And then, perhaps, some day he should marry to suit himself. So dreamed the inexperienced youth of twenty-three.

CHAPTER II.

FERN ALDEN.

The breakfast-room of the Alden mansion was a sunny, cheerful place. It was large, and its size imparted an air of elegance and richness, for the furnishings were costly but not numerous. The table was massive, and shone with the snowiest damask, silver, and cut glass; and on a beautiful centerpiece, embroidered by Fern Alden's own hands, was a costly vase filled with cut flowers and asparagus ferns.

The sun was just streamed in through the wide-sashed window on potted plants in full blossom; and a great oleander stood in a niche by the doorway, its red blossoms contrasting with the rich hangings, and giving the room an appearance of warmth and color. A painting, appropriate to the apartment, hung on the wall opposite the breakfast table, and the sideboard contained a salver on which was the morning's mail.

Mr. Alden was in his place at the table when Glen made his appearance. He had been a worker instead of a man of leisure, and was always an early riser. There were days now when he did not leave his room at all; but when his health permitted he was down soon after the gong had sounded. His daughter, in a fascinating breakfast gown of flimsy white material presided at the silver coffee urn.

Fern Alden was a brown-eyed, brown-haired damsel, with glowing, dimpling cheeks and a well-rounded chin. She wore her lustrous hair in a sort of coronet on the top of her aristocratically-poised head. Observing her closely this morning Glen doubted if the fair Lillith could even compare with his sister in the matter of beauty, but in spite of himself he was a little anxious to behold this seraphic maid, and somewhat curious as to her personal appearance. Yet over all was a slight contempt for a weakness that would permit this charming girl to marry for a worldly purpose only. It bothered him a little to feel that she must in turn hold the same contempt for him.

Suddenly an impulsive desire to escape the sacrifice demanded took possession of him. Was there no other way in which he could redeem the old home and its belongings? He and Fern both had inherited an income from their mother sufficient for their needs, but the principal could not be touched until their wedding day. If he could only have more time, he would look around for a vocation. He might fit himself for some profession. But what use? The professions were crowded now, and he would need to force an opening in a wedge-like manner and excel in his calling, or eventually be down and out. And he was not fitted either by natural ability or special education for anything in which he could hope to excel. Nothing he could think of in the business line appealed to him or seemed to be within his scope. His hobby, if he possessed one, was for an out-of-door life. Hitherto his life had been an idle one, except for the energy he had put into athletics and into hunting and fishing in the Adirondack Mountains.

The call of out-of-doors took hold of him suddenly. There might be a chance for him to win a fortune on the prairies of the West, the plains of Texas, or even the lumber regions of the North. There was certainly no room for him in the business world of the city, unequipped as he was in business ability. Still, do what he would, succeed as he might, it all took time, years perhaps, and it would come too late to save his father from financial ruin, and, therefore, himself from the sacrifice he had agreed to make. What use to struggle against Fate?

While he was yet absorbed in thought concerning his future course of action, Fern addressed him and brought his mind back to present things.

"I suppose, Glen, that father has told you of our forthcoming ball?"

"No," answered her brother, trying to look interested. "We gave one not long ago, didn't we?"

"Oh, that is ages in the past," she laughed, for Fern was given to extravagant expressions. "And this is to be the most elaborate of any we have ever attempted—it being for the purpose of launching into Chicago society some old acquaintances of papa's, lately arrived from the East. Of course, the young ladies have made their debut, so it is not to be a coming-out ball."

"The young ladies?" Glen glanced at his father inquiringly. He felt in that moment as if he had been cheated. Why, if there were two, had his father hidden the fact from him? Surely, he might at least have been given a chance to choose between them.

"I failed to mention," said Mr. Alden, in answer to that inquiring glance, as he sat down his coffee cup with a hand that trembled slightly, "that Mrs. Bennett has a stepdaughter, though it is not generally known that Gloria Bennett is not her own child."

"Ah," mused Glen, "it is Mrs. Bennett's own daughter, of course, that she is desirous of placing."

And then he remembered a dream he had had after retiring the night before. He had been thinking, after that interview with his father, how suddenly his mode of life had lost all charms for him. His club, lunching at swell restaurants, the tallyho parties, theaters, and all the rest of his daily routine seemed so utterly aimless. And then had come to him in his dream a vision of the future Mrs. Glen Alden (as if that was what was needed to make life complete). But she was not in the least like Lillith Bennett. Judging from his father's description of her, she was fair as an Easter lily, with an angel-like face and hair the color of ripe corn. Her eyes were of the deepest violet hue, her lips had the color of the seashell where its tint is the deepest, and her cheeks had the glow of the blush rose upon them.

And this girl he dreamed of? In contrast Lillith would look like a faded blossom. She was dark, this dream-lady, with a glorious radiance hovering about her. Her complexion was gypsy-like, almost. By that is meant, not the real gypsy swarthiness, but the idealized olive skin and its accouterments—purplish-black hair, eyes like limpid wells of darkness, and lips of deepest carmine. She was radiant, glorious! And she looked at him with witching eyes.

"It is I whom you should wed instead of Lillith Bennett," he heard her say, in his dream, and then she faded into the shadows that lurked in the corners of his room. And when he awoke in the morning she had vanished as completely as the shadows themselves.

He laughed upon awakening when he remembered his dream.

"But I shall wed Lillith Bennett, my dream-lady," he said aloud. "It is Fate."

And now that he had consented to make of marriage a matter of business, he was desirous of having the sacrifice, as he was determined to call it, over with as soon as convenient, that he might shake the dust of the city from his feet. For thus he had stipulated when the bargain between his father and himself had been made. He left it to him to present his ultimatum to Mrs. Bennett, and she in turn to her daughter. The bride would have her position, and his sister could see to gratifying her social aspirations. She would have no need of him.

"And it is at the ball two weeks hence that I am to meet your old friend and her daughters?" he asked, after his period of reflection. "Fern, another cup of coffee, please. My nerves are a trifle shaky this morning, owing to a dream I had last night."

"I shall give you the coffee, Glen, of course," said Fern, as she filled his cup, "but in exchange you must tell me the dream that could upset the nerves of a healthy young person like my brother."

"Well, this is my version of it," he replied, as he reached for the cup of amber liquid into which his sister, with practiced hand and accurate knowledge of his preference, had put a plentiful supply of cream and sugar, "though the details are a trifle different: I was at the altar with what the world called the fairest woman in existence, when another, whose beauty eclipsed hers entirely, to my mind, plucked at my sleeve and drew me away from her. But it was too late, for the fatal words had been said over us—were were married according to the law."

"And then?" prompted Fern, her eyes sparkling with interest.

"And then I deserted them both for the call of the wild. I didn't want the one I had, and I couldn't have the one I wanted, so I fled to the wilderness and lived near to Nature's heart till I was lost to civilization. And the strange part of it was I rather liked the life; it was freedom from conventions as well as from the marriage bond."

As the reader knows Glen's dream was enlarged upon by his waking imagination. Mr. Alden looked startled at first, but Fern laughed and remarked:

"When you find a place free from conventional life, Glen, come back just once to get me." When upon, they all laughed, for Fern, be it known, was a stickler for conventionality.

But Mr. Alden soon went back to the subject nearest his heart.

"It is not necessary to wait until the night of the ball before meeting Miss Bennett," he began.

"The Misses Bennett," corrected Glen, "for of course she won't keep the stepdaughter locked in her chamber. She will simply instruct her to remain in the background, and not try to outshine her sister."

Fern looked mystified, and seemed a trifle surprised at her brother's tone of sarcasm. But his father interrupted him with emphasis.

"Miss Bennett, if you please."

"Which, of course, is the elder, and therefore the stepdaughter."

He had never spoken like that to his father in all his life; and Fern wondered at his disrespect. The fact was that he felt a little reckless, having once got started. Mr. Alden thought best not to notice his remark. He knew his son understood quite well that it was Miss Lillith Bennett in whom he was expected to become interested.

"We are invited to meet them all before the night of the ball," he said. "They have taken a house on this same street. We are not to remain strangers, you perceive. Fern has already met them, and you and I will call this afternoon, if you have no other engagement."

"I have no engagement of importance," his son answered. "I never do have. I can cancel anything I have on hand at any time."

"How fortunate," smiled his sister, "for I can see that papa has some designs on you and Miss Lillith. Own up, papa."

"I confess, Fern, that it would please me greatly to witness a union between your brother and the daughter of my old friend."

"Well, I am sure she is sweet enough to win any man's love. But don't fling them at each other's head, papa mine, if you want satisfactory results."

This remark caused the old man to bow his head in reflection. If he had taken his daughter into his confidence, instead of informing Glen what was wanted of him, she would have managed it, and the couple in question would never have dreamed of her designs. As it was, he would have to look sharp or his plans would fall through. Glen was already beginning to show signs of rebellion.

It was three o'clock that afternoon, when an elegant turnout drew up at the carriage door of Mrs. Bennett's stately residence, and father and son alighted. They were ushered into the reception hall by the liveried servant, and later were shown into the drawingroom. Gloria Bennett alone awaited them. As Fate

would have it. Mr. Alden had chosen a time when Lillith and her mother were out. Making the best of the situation, he presented his son, and then inquired for the others.

As Glen Alden lifted his eyes to the young woman's face he gave a visible start. A thrill shot through his heart, which made the blood run riot in his veins. No wonder she was named Gloria, he thought, for she was glorious, entrancing.

She wore an afternoon gown of black, gauze-like material, shimmering with silver embroidery. The billowy train glimmered as she advanced to meet them. The bodice was slightly decollete, showing a perfect contour of throat and arms. The purplish-black hair and midnight eyes were a wonder of fascination to him. There was witchery in those eyes and in the smile she gave them in greeting. It won the heart of both father and son. Suddenly Glen remembered the lady of his dream.

"Mamma and Lillith are out," she told them, in answer to Mr. Alden's inquiry. "I fear they will not return soon. Will you be seated, gentlemen? I am sure mamma will be sorry she missed seeing you."

Her personality seemed to envelop them. Both men felt the charm of her presence, and were inclined to linger, despite the fact that the one they had come to see was absent. And as they seated themselves in the sumptuous drawingroom, they forgot everything but the glorious being who so ably entertained them.

When they rose to take their departure, she accompanied them to the door of the drawingroom, and summoned a servant to show them to their carriage. Glen lingered over her hand at parting, but suppressed the impulse to raise it to his lips, yet he was no more reluctant to relinquish those white fingers than was Mr. Alden himself. He could not account for it, but his affections were completely captured, and he, as well as Glen, wished that this glorious being was the one destined to become Mrs. Glen Alden. Glen turned for a last look, and as Gloria lifted her eyes they regarded each other silently for a moment; then in confusion both turned away.

Father and son rode home in silence together. Neither seemed to remember that they had missed seeing the one they had sought—that they had been entertained by the wrong woman. Glen evaded his sister's questioning and took dinner at the club that night. He was dissatisfied and uneasy.

In his room that evening the elder Mr. Alden paced to and fro, a vague suspicion growing into a more pronounced one—a suspicion that never before had entered his mind, and a fear, an intangible dread of learning the truth—if what he imagined should prove to be the truth—almost overwhelmed him.

He remained in his own apartments for the next three days and had his meals served to him there. He took no interest in the preparations for the ball to be given in honor of his old friend and her daughters. He did not mention the Bennetts again, but seemed to be brooding over something that obliterated his desire for the wedding from his mind.

But he was aroused to the present issue by a call from Mrs. Bennett. This lady was of medium height, slightly—only slightly—inclined to stoutness. She was a comely woman still. Her once dark hair was turned to silver; but her complexion was fresh and tinted with color. She looked very inviting to the lonely old man, but he shrank back abashed in her presence. He had done that from the first, but now, since his visit to Gloria, he felt more humiliated than ever before.

After expressing her sympathy because of his indisposition in a cordial manner, she said:

"I regret very much our absence when you brought your son to see Lillith. I suppose it was to see her that you induced him to call?"

"Yes." Then after a silence he broke forth suddenly. "Ellen," he cried, "need it make so very much difference which of your daughters you give to my son? A union with your elder daughter would benefit Lillith indirectly. She would eventually make a match as good as the one you contemplate for her."

He watched her keenly, seeking to read in her face whether his suspicions were correct. But her countenance remained impassive.

"And why, may I ask, do you prefer Gloria for your son?"

"Glen was greatly impressed with the young lady. If he is to wed to please us, it is only fair to allow him to choose between them. It would be much easier to persuade the boy in the direction his inclinations tend."

"But it is my child that I wish to wed with your son, and I believe I explained to you that Gloria was my husband's daughter."

"Yes," he said, in a strained voice, and went nearer to her. "But which husband? The first, or the second? You have had two, you know. In Heaven's name, tell me the truth!"

"Well, since it seems necessary, and you demand it, I will answer you, if only to put the wild idea of permitting your son to woo Gloria out of your head. She belongs to my first husband—and she is also mine!" She looked at him composedly while she made this statement, a cool light in her hazel eyes.

Mr. Alden gave a start of shocked surprise, though he had only had his suspicions confirmed. He was not sure before, and then he had not looked for the revelation to be made in this unemotional way. Evidently, Ellen Danford, for such had been her maiden name, had outgrown her impulsive, emotional nature. He bowed his head in his hands, and for a time neither spoke. Then he rose and went to her side.

"Ellen, let us give up this idea of mating our children. There is another road to the goal you covet; let bygones be bygones. Marry me, Ellen. We are too old to harbor resentment. Let us make up the old differences."

Mrs. Bennett leaned back in the luxurious chair whose capacious depths nearly hid her from sight, and smiled back at him—nay, laughed in his face, as she had done once before.

"How absurd!" and she showed a set of even, white teeth that, despite her fifty-odd years, had never required a dentist's inspection. "I never really loved but one man—and he is dead. Besides, I have been married enough; a third time would be ridiculous."

"But it would be different if you married me, Ellen. I loved you in those old days."

"Fie on such love! Let us cease to

"I will do your bidding," he said.

discuss the subject. We must stick to our original intention of wedding our two children. You know now why your son cannot be permitted to choose between them. It is Lillith he must wed, or the bargain is off."

"Let it be so," replied the old man, resignedly. "I will speak to him about it at once."

"But mind you do not betray, even to him, the secret of Gloria's birth. The child herself does not know; it is my secret, remember. You are the only one ever to mistrust it."

She arose to go, and he accompanied her to the door.

"Glen will not be able to meet your daughter Lillith until the night of the ball," he remarked, apologetically. "He has absented himself for some reason; but he has promised his sister he will be present on that occasion, and Glen never goes back on a promise."

When she had gone and he found himself once more alone, the old man—older in appearance than ever now—crept up the stairs to his bedroom, which he had left only at her request for an interview, and sought his couch. He was nervous and overcome with emotion.

As it happened, Glen turned up that very evening, contrary to his sire's expectations. He had dinner alone with his sister, as his father felt too indisposed to come down. The two ate in silence, till the dessert was brought and they were left alone together. Then Glen spoke:

"Say, Fern, I want your influence with father in a matter that concerns me most particularly. What do you say to helping me?"

"If my influence is worth anything, you are welcome to it, most certainly, but father cannot be disturbed tonight. He seems nervous and despondent. His old acquaintance he was telling you about called today, and he has not been himself since. I sat with him a while and tried to entertain him, but I soon divined that he wished to be alone. But what is it you want, Glen? I can see him about it tomorrow."

"There is something about those people we don't understand, Fern," her brother said, instead of replying to her question. "But there is one thing I am sure of—I am dead in love with that woman's daughter, and the worst of it is I have fallen in love with the wrong one."

"Why the wrong one, Glen?"

"Because it is the other one I am destined to marry. The one known as Gloria, and she is rightly named, is, as I understand it, only a stepdaughter, and though she is the elder she must stand back and wait until the own daughter is settled in life, as the mother expresses it."

"And does Mrs. Bennett think you are the only eligible young man in the city of Chicago?"

"I am the only match of any description she knows of at present, and she and father have put their heads together and settled it. I am to marry Lillith Bennett, whom I have not yet set eyes upon, and I love her sister, Gloria, whom I have seen but once. I have promised my father, and unless you induce him to release me from that promise, I shall be obliged to marry the wrong girl."

"I will see father about it in the morning," replied Fern. "I have a confession of my own to make, and I will put in a word for you at the same time. My own dilemma is not entirely unlike yours, but it is much worse. How am I ever going to summon courage to confess it to father?"

Then both rose to their feet in excitement, for Mr. Alden, who had a secret of his own, one he did not dream of confessing to anybody, was standing in the doorway, an ashen pallor on his face. Had he overheard their conversation? Even as they asked the question in their own hearts his hand involuntarily went to his breast, clutching wildly at its covering. They rushed to his side as he tottered and was about to fall.

CHAPTER III.

FERN'S SECRET.

Mr. Alden regained his composure in a degree as his children reached his side, but he was too agitated to stay the words that were trembling upon his lips.

"Don't do it, Glen," he whispered hoarsely, "don't do it, no matter what the consequences. It will wreck your life!"

"What did he mean?" they asked of each other, when they had assisted him to bed and summoned his valet to attend him. They were in the library now, and both were perplexed, mystified.

"Maybe he is afraid I will persist in my infatuation for Gloria," Glen said, at last.

Fern went up to her father's room to see if he was resting, and found him muttering to himself in broken sentences. Taking his hand she sat down beside him.

"What is it you wish Glen not to do, father? Surely, he will obey you."

"Yes, that is it, he will obey me; and it means misery for him—possibly divorce. That is the worst of all, my daughter—divorce. There are consequences one cannot foresee. Better live single all one's life."

Fern thought his mind wandered, and after administering his usual sleeping potion, she sent his man to sleep in the same room with him, and went back to the library where Glen awaited her return. It was growing late, the paper he had been scanning had fallen to the floor, and he was dreaming. The light of anticipated happiness was in his eyes; he had forgotten the inevitable that was hovering over him. She glided to his side and stood with her hand on his shoulder before he looked up.

"I think," she ventured, "that father meant it would wreck your life if you obeyed him and married Lillith when you are in love with Gloria. He was muttering something about divorce, and I think he feared it might come to that in your case."

"No," Glen replied, moodily, "I think he meant to warn me that it would mean misery if I married Gloria against his wishes and those of her mother. And it wouldn't do—not after my promise. There is something about our father's past I do not understand. But I feel that suit for Gloria's hand would be a failure. If I should woo and win her love it would bring sorrow to us both. Mrs. Bennett would never consent. I shall not seek her again, but shall keep to my promise and marry Lillith before I rebel outright. But Fern, you spoke of a confession. You cannot approach with it now. Is it anything you can confide to me?"

"To you, if to anybody, Glen. You will judge me more leniently than any one, I know, and father cannot be bothered with my affairs for some time. He seems greatly worried over something. Why, if he desires a match between you and his friend's daughter, does he seem so upset over it?"

"He knows it is with reluctance that I consent to his wishes."

"Then why does he insist? There is some mystery about the influence of these people over our father. But they must be respectable, or he would not wish the alliance."

Glen did not tell his father's reasons for wishing the marriage to take place. If he had thought best to keep his financial troubles from her it was not his place to divulge them. Fern did not dream of the slender chance that was keeping the roof over her head—that it all depended on him. He must be about his wooing if his sister was to retain the protection of a home. There must be a semblance of a courtship, at least.

"Let me hear your story, Fern," he said, changing the subject. "It is late, but neither of us feels like sleeping just yet. We have kept late hours before this, you and I. It is this society business that turns night into day for most people. I don't crave poverty, by any means, but or, for freedom from the demands made by the social world! If one might only do as one pleased!"

"What you need, Glen, is another trip to the Adirondack Mountains. You get restless about every so often if you haven't been fishing or hunting somewhere. I can furnish you an excuse that will take you to the Ausable region—to St. Hubert's Inn."

"Why that particular place, Fern?"

"It is there, in Keene Valley, that the problem I am trying to solve lies hidden. There the person I am searching for has domiciled himself for the summer."

"And who is this person?"

"Ah, that is what you have to find out for me. To learn the person's name and other things I shall tell you of, is my commission. You might spend your honeymoon there, if it is true you are going to be married. There is no more picturesque scenery in all the world, probably."

Glen leaned forward eagerly.

"Tell me exactly what you want of me. It will furnish me a chance to get away from my bride till I become accustomed to the thought of being a benedict. Or till I can forget that I ever met Gloria Bennett. Father knows my intentions, though he may not believe I will insist on carrying them out. The conditions were not all on one side the 'managing mamma' will find that out to her surprise."

Fern shook her head. "It won't do," she said. "I can't be the means of parting husband and wife."

"You mean parting bridegroom and bride."

"It is the same thing."

"No, not quite the same; she will be my wife in name only. There will be no love between us, and that makes the difference. It will be a mock marriage to us, though it will seem real enough to the public."

"Then why do you submit?"

"Tell me your own story, Fern," he said, without answering her question.

"I have a secret, Glen, one you would never guess if I did not tell you. But

it will not surprise you so much, after all; for you have that in your nature which will help you to understand."

"A secret from me, Fern?" exclaimed Glen, reproachfully.

"Oh, that was part of the spice of it—keeping it a secret. Now, don't look so scandalized. Think of placing one of my temperament in the environments of our social set—the soul-deadening routine that some people thrive on. I like it for a change; but mine is a dual nature, and the other part of me just thirsts to outrage the proprieties."

"Fern Alden! I never thought it of you?"

"Now don't get shocked, my society-sick brother. I have done nothing disgraceful in my own eyes, and my conscience is as particular as need be."

"But never to have let me into the secret till you needed me."

"It is just as well for you that I didn't for now I am repenting in dust and ashes. The very fact that I need your help proves my folly in trying to be anything but what I seem—a conventional young lady. My behavior would appear outrageous to some of our associates."

"Then what you seem is not what you are?"

"Yes, while I seem it. It is to another kind of company—a Bohemian set—I have acted out the other part of my nature."

Glen drew a long breath and waited. She was very slow in coming to the point, he thought.

"I will tell you how it was. I never meant to tell my father the whole story—only that part of it that made possible the entanglement I have got into because of my wild longing after unrestraint."

She paused, and settling back into the luxurious depths of a great sleepy hollow, drew a long sigh. Glen, quick to appreciate her situation, arose to his feet, and touching the switch, turned off the electric current, leaving the room in darkness, except for the moonlight that streamed in through the library window.

"We are getting nowhere," he said, "and I want that confession before daylight, Fern. Confessions are good for the soul, it is said. I believe, also, they are easier made in the dark. Now, what did you do? Flirt with a married man, or win some girl's fiance away from her?"

His sister gave a little nervous laugh.

"Wait," she said, "I am not going to tell you what I did until I have explained to you how I came to do it. I am in a great mix-up, Glen, and you must help me. You are the only one interested enough in me to take the matter up and straighten out the tangle, or prove it is not so much of a tangle as I suppose. Either will be satisfactory."

"To the point, girl! I am getting impatient. I told you I would go to the end of the world just now on any pretext, didn't I? At any rate, I am ready for anything in your behalf. Now, what is it?"

"And you really want to run away from the sweetest girl in the world? You will be sorry some day, Glen, when it is too late."

Glen yawned. "I am tired of hearing her praises. I shall get tired of the very thought of her before we ever meet, I fear. But get busy with that confession, or I shall sink into slumber from ennui."

"Well, then, I am married!"

Like a bombshell this information burst upon him and paralyzed his senses for the space of a moment; then, as if inaction were impossible, he sprang to his feet.

"Fern Alden do you mean that?"

His sister rose from the hollow of that capacious chair, and stood straight and tall before him. Then, as the wonder died out of his face, and an anxious expression began to take its place, she turned and paced back and forth the length of the room, agitated now, as the restraint she had put upon herself began to give way.

"Oh, Glen! If I could only undo it! If it was only a horrible nightmare from which I might awaken! So many times I have wakened from a terrible dream and thanked God that I had only been dreaming. But this—this is reality!"

Glen was standing by the table, not knowing what to do. But a tender, sympathetic light was in his eyes; for he loved his beautiful sister.

"It was a misalliance—it must have been, if you feel that way about it."

"Not exactly that, but I married the wrong man."

Like a shot Glen fell back into his seat. He was about to wed the wrong woman, and he could understand the tragedy of it. And if it had proved so disastrous in her case, what might he expect of the future? Ought'nt he to take warning and profit by her experience? But his father? What of him if he weakened now? No, he had given his promise, and he must go on.

"The wrong man! You mean——"

"That I am bound to one while I love another."

"That must not be, Fern! You must tear all thoughts of the other out of your heart."

"I don't want to do that, and I could not if I tried. I am in the same position as you were in your dream: I do not want the one I have, and I cannot have the one I want."

Glen sat thoughtful for a moment, then he rose and paced the floor as his sister had done. After a while he turned and asked:

"How came you to make the fatal mistake? Tell me the particulars."

"I must go back to the beginning, Glen. I wanted to in the first place, but you insisted on my coming to the point. You see I tired of the the sameness of my life. I wanted something new, something less restraining and more informal. I felt a desire to be myself occasionally—to shake off the feeling that the critical eyes of the world were upon me. I love social supremacy at times; but when my opposite nature, my other self, is uppermost, I feel like doing outlandish, hoidenish things. It is a reaction from being so precise, I verily believe."

"Fern, will you tell me what you have done? Or will you rattle on, like Tennyson's brook, forever?"

"Well, to begin with, I joined a society, or rather I heiped organize one, called the Jolly Girls' Club. I had found there were others with a dual nature, who, like myself, were longing for something out of the ordinary; and so we planned to meet once a week and have a jolly, good time."

"You need not have organized to keep jolly; it is born in most girls," Glen interrupted her to say.

"Well, the tendency to be care-free and animated was being crusned out of us, slowly but surely, by the strait-laced dames of our set. In this new society we have the utmost freedom in everything. We dress as we like, and do our hair any old way—any way that is not the prevailing style.

"We rented a building for our meetings, and it is known to be a girls' club house, but the real name of our organization is known only to its members. For a while we had rollicking good times among ourselves. Then, as things began to grow commonplace, one of the girls, inspired by a spirit of mischief (for anything went with us that had an innocent intention back of it), brought her brother to one of our meetings, disguised as a girl, and introduced him as a friend from away out West. Well, of course, we pumped him for information about the country he had come from, thinking all the time he was a girl, and finally discovered that he was utterly ignorant of Western atmosphere. And from beginning to mistrust he was not from the West, we finally ended by doubting that he was a girl. Before any one guessed her intention one of the girls pulled off the wig of curls and curtain and disclosed the imposition. He was obliged to confess his sex in confusion; while his sister who should have been overwhelmed, also, merely laughed at the prank she had played upon us.

"Well, as our society was extravagantly Bohemian, we were obliged to accept it as a joke, just as she meant it. It was against our rules ever to expel a member. Once a Jolly Girl, always a Jolly Girl, so our constitution read. We tried for something original."

"And you got it, I should judge."

"Well, we didn't want it generally known that we had formed such a society, and a member once expelled would feel released from her oath of secrecy, hence our vows of a lifetime membership. And we put that mere man through all sorts of oaths, every one of which he broke without conscience, for the good of his fellow-beings, he told us later. For he and several of his cronies straightway formed an auxiliary and called it the Jolly Boy's Club."

"If you had only let me know, sis," Glen said, with an envious sigh.

"I didn't want even you to know about our club, and I shall not tell you now half our jolly larks. But one of them has ruined my life. It is just as well you were not one of us. But to go on: The first thing the boys did was to send an invitation to the whole club to attend a midnight supper at their quarters. An Eveless Eden, they told us, was not to their liking. It was altogether too tame. We might be able to live without them, they argued, but they couldn't enjoy one another any longer; they had exhausted every means of amusement, and now they must have feminine society. And this after only a few evenings of their own company.

"To cut the story short, it was voted upon among us, and every vote was found to be in the affirmative. You see, we were getting dull ourselves. We went, and that was the beginning of a union of the two clubs, to a certain extent, for of course we had to give a return supper.

"They were all nice young men of excellent families—society's shining lights—who wanted to do the unconventional from pure bubbling over spirits. I felt no qualms of conscience over anything that I did. But had I remained in the beaten track I should not have been in this entanglement. It was done for a lark, but it has turned out to be a tragedy. For oh, Glen! my life is ruined!"

"Tell me more, my sister, and let me help you."

"One night," she continued, "one never-to-be-forgotten night, the girls induced me to put on men's clothing and go through a marriage ceremony with one of the girls. We were alone when we began the fun, but, unknown to the rest of us, one of the girls had invited every member of the masculine club to witness the mock marriage, which was to be an elaborate affair; and there they all sat in well-behaved expectancy when I came in and met my bride at the altar. She wore the regular bridal attire, veil and all, and carried a bouquet of white roses.

"I was a little confused when I saw that the members of the boys' club were present, but I braced up and went through the ceremony quite unconcerned, for I was masked and otherwise disguised."

"But, Fern, I don't quite understand how——"

"Don't you see? That supposed girl was one of the boys in feminine attire, and the officiating 'minister' was a real justice of the peace (a member of the other club), and we were married as fast as a real marriage ceremony could make us."

Glen Alden leaned back in his chair and smiled at his sister. A brotherly consideration for her feelings prevented him laughing outright, for he saw she was in deadly earnest.

"Such a marriage amounts to nothing," he said, reassuringly. "Don't give it another moment's worry."

"So I thought at first; but I have investigated and learned that neither of us can marry another legally until this mock ceremony is annulled by the court."

"But that is easily done."

"It is publicity I fear. So many happenings from this locality have got into the newspapers that I tremble at every ring of the doorbell, lest a reporter is seeking an interview that it may be blazoned to the world through the medium of the press."

"It isn't of that much importance, child. You are imaginary, and give the harmless frolic undue importance."

"You would never make a reporter, Glen, if you think so. Properly dressed by a practiced hand, it would make quite a story without much exaggeration," she answered. "And you know these newspaper men."

"Well, it isn't bait worthy a scoop, is it?" Glen laughed.

"I don't know about that. It could be made into quite a scandal."

He rose to his feet, suppressing a yawn. "I will find some way to help you, Fern. Don't worry over it any more."

Before a reply could be given both were startled by a slight tapping on the window-pane, not three feet from where they stood.

Fern stifled a scream, as Glen sprang forward and threw up the sash. There was no one in sight, and he finally closed the window and turned away. But Fern knew what the tapping meant only too well. It was a telegraphic message accurately tapped out to her by a member of the Jolly Girls' Club. And its significance startled and mystified her.

The continuation of this remarkable story will be found in the Ledger issue of next week. If you are not a regular subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year, and we have stories awaiting publication that you cannot afford to miss.

Yost Middleton's Wife;

Or, A WELL KEPT SECRET

By T. C. HARBAUGH

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CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE RENDS THE CLOUDS.

IT WAS the agonizing cry of his wife in the little park opposite his hotel that thrilled Yost Middleton to the depths of his soul. He held out his hands imploringly to the fleeing Edith and called her name. She did not seem to hear, or if she heard she did not heed. A sinister smile came to the face of Barry Stokes. He watched Edith till the trees hid her and then turned away.

"The gulf will never be crossed," he said to himself, with the delight of an arch fiend. "The vulture was too much for me, and I owe my life to Middleton's interference, perhaps."

He turned to quit the spot, but the hand of Middleton fell upon his shoulder.

"You?" exclaimed Yost, recognizing his former servant. "What are you doing here?"

A lie bubbled to Barry's tongue, but the glare from Middleton's eyes warned him to beat it down.

"I am liable to be anywhere," he said. "The robber had your wife, I mean Edith, in his grip and I came to the rescue. Then he turned upon me with the fury of a wolf——"

"And I came in time to save your worthless life?" broke in Edith's husband.

Stokes swallowed hard and broke away.

"Go!" exclaimed Middleton. "Put an ocean between us, dog that you are! Cross my path again and I will not be answerable for what happens."

Barry Stokes heard, but did not respond. The shadows of the street hid him, the buildings rose between him and the American, and ere long he had passed beyond the pale of Middleton's rage.

As for the disowned wife, she, too, was hurrying from the strange events which had once more brought her face to face with her husband. In the depths of a cab she was sitting silent with clasped hands and a face devoid of color. His voice still sounded in her ears; he had touched her, the first time in years, and she felt that touch in the silence of her night ride.

Lemora was asleep when she tiptoed to her couch and bent over her with a mother's tenderness. The beautiful girl opened her eyes and gazed long and wonderingly into Edith's face.

"You have slept well, my child?" asked Edith.

"I have slept and dreamed," was the reply. "I thought the old days had come back."

A choking sensation arose in Edith Middleton's throat. She averted her face for a moment, but it came slowly back to the young girl on the silken couch.

"The old days?" she echoed.

"Yes," sighed Lemora, "the days before we crossed the sea. Will they ever return, mamma?"

"Perhaps," Edith answered. "Perhaps, child," and as she turned away her ashen lips continued: "They cannot return till I have fulfilled my vow."

Edith retired to her own chamber to sleep, though the heart of the night had passed and the new day would soon dawn upon Paris. She threw herself upon her couch, dressed as she was, and the hands of slumber closed her heavy lids.

Lemora was the first to rise with the light of morning on her face. She opened Edith's door and for several moments stared at the silent form on the bed and then noiselessly withdrew. A rap reached her ears through the parlor door, and, springing up, she crossed the room and laid her hand on the knob. When she opened the door a little cry welled from her throat, and she stood face to face with Mason Marx. A smile of pleasure crossed Lemora's face. The young man entered and looked at her in silence.

"I have come to say good-by," said he. "I shall quit Paris tonight."

"So soon?"

"Why not? I am but a block in the way here," he went on. "You, Lemora, will remain with—Edith."

He had never called her other than Edith in her presence, though the young girl knew that she was yet the wife of Yost Middleton.

"Shall I call on her?" asked Lemora, as her gaze wandered to the door.

"No! no!" cried Mason. "She will know in time that I have gone. I have come to see you, Lemora."

They went to the window which overlooked the already busy street below. Mason Marx stood silent beside the fair creature, his hand softly touching hers and their faces almost in contact. Suddenly he spoke:

"Has Edith told you all?"

The words thrilled Lemora.

"All?" she echoed, strangely. "No, not all. Mamma has a secret."

"I know," smiled Mason. "It is one that has cost her much."

"Yes, a home, a love, the happiness of her life."

"And I have absolved her," came from the young man's throat. "Oh, Heaven! what ways you women have."

She heard him, but answered not.

"You know of the trial in New York?" he suddenly resumed. "I was charged with murder. I stood within the coils with the world against me, and it is against me still. Edith came to my rescue. She set her husband against me by her silence. She would not reveal the one secret of our lives. The time then had not come for that."

"Will it ever come?" and the young girl looked up into his face with pleading.

"As far as I am concerned it can come at any time," he responded. "I am the cause of the clouds that have darkened your sky and Edith's. I am the blot on your peace and happiness. I am the one man whom you should hate."

"I never hate," answered the beautiful creature. "You should know that, Mason."

"Thank Heaven for one angel in this wicked world!" he exclaimed. "Nay," as Lemora took a quick step toward the door. "Do not waken her. Give her this," he took a letter from his pocket and placed it in her hands. "She will know all when she reads it."

Lemora's fingers closed about the missive, and he drew her unresisting to his heart.

"When the skies clear," he said, looking down into the brilliant eyes swimming in their lucent depths, "at eventide there shall be light."

"Light and peace!" cried Lemora.

In another moment the girl stood in the room alone. The soft daylight filtered through the lace curtains and fell upon her beautiful face. The letter seemed to burn her hands with its unread mystery. He was gone, and she and Edith were left alone to fight to the end the battle which had raged within them ever since they set foot upon the Continent.

Lemora went back to Edith's chamber, but the sleeper had not awakened. With trembling hands she laid the letter upon Edith's pillow and stole noiselessly from the room.

Would the disowned wife never waken? If Lemora had known of the events of the past night she would have had more wonder and speculation in her eyes than she showed. If she had known that husband and wife had met, she would have stolen back to Edith's chamber and folded her head in her arms.

Lemora fell asleep in the depths of the soft armchair in the middle of the room. The sounds below no longer fell upon her ears, and she dreamed, let us hope, of better days, when the full light of love would come back to Edith and her own heart be filled to completion with that happiness which a young girl craves

All at once she heard a cry which brought her to her feet and dissipated the alluring vision. Edith, white-faced and breathless, stood before her, holding Mason's letter in her hand. Their eyes met.

"Who brought this?" cried Edith, holding forth the missive which she had opened.

Lemora flushed and then went white. "He brought it, mamma," she answered. "He came in person while you slept."

Edith Middleton grasped a chair for support and fought a terrible battle with herself.

"Is it important, mamma?" asked Lemora.

"It is the last turn of the lane?" was the reply. "We shall pack up at once. We may catch the noon express. There must be no delay, child."

"But, mamma——"

"No!" interrupted Edith. "All the gold of Golconda cannot keep me in Paris. You do not know, my dear. The arrows are pointing to the prize of vengeance. I feel that the secret which I have guarded so long and well trembles on the fringe of revealment. We must bestir ourselves. Beyond the sea, back in the old home, I will fight the last battle of my life. God pity me!"

Edith turned away and stood for a moment at the window. The eyes of the beautiful young girl followed her in love and sympathy. They saw Edith's hands open the letter. Her swimming eyes sought its contents once more, and if Lemora could have looked over her shoulder she would have read:

"Edith:—Blake Abernathy has purchased a ticket for New York. I will not lose sight of the world's greatest villain. Heaven bless you and nerve your hand for vengeance. MASON."

CHAPTER XVIII.
NEMESIS.

A handsome man strolled into the brilliant foyer of the Imperial and deposited himself in a cosy armchair in one corner. Although his appearance was neat and well made up, he had a certain air of weariness about him. He drew a silver cigar box from his pocket and proceeded to select a prime Havana therefrom. In another moment he was in the heart of a smoker's contentment and was casually watching those who flitted to and fro about the place.

"It's a good thing to get back to one's native heath," he said, half aloud, with the cigar poised before him. "I'm glad to be here after my experience on the Continent. It's not a pleasant thing to have a mad woman at one's heels, even though she is a beauty and fancies she has grievances." He laughed at the thought. "If the girl's hand hadn't quavered a bit, I wouldn't be on this side of the Atlantic and back in old New York. It was a close call. The bullet was aimed straight enough, but it only plowed its way under my skin and left a trifling scar in the middle of my forehead, no thanks to the girl, however."

Blake Abernathy resumed his musing.

"I've been back a whole week, and my eyes haven't caught sight of the divine Edith and the beautiful Lemora. And then there are the others in my jack-pot of romance—Middleton himself, Barry Stokes, and Mason Marx. I gave them the slip in Paris right and proper, though they may transfer their part of the drama to this land of the free and the home of the brave." He flicked the ashes from his cigar with a jeweled finger. "Perhaps I played the wrong card when I encountered Middleton in the cafe and showed him Edith's wedding ring. It was a pretty tale I put up to him, and when I modestly asked for the hand of Lemora he leaned across the table like a tiger and said he would kill me before he'd consent to my little game. Ha! ha!"

As the laugh rippled from his tongue, Abernathy rose and approached the desk. The bediamoned clerk reached up to his box and extracted a letter which he handed across the counter to him. Blake took it with a gleam of wonderment in his eyes and stepped back. He returned to the chair, and after studying the superscription for a moment, broke the seal.

"What's this?" he said under his breath. "A friend wants to see me at Number 1919 Violet avenue. And, by Jove! this very night."

He read and reread the missive.

"If I were still in Paris this letter would set me to thinking," he went on. "I would deem it a cunning snare laid for my destruction, but——"

He ceased and read the letter for the last time, then he restored it to its cov-

He stood face to face with Edith Middleton.

ering and strolled out of the hotel. Twenty minutes later a cab deposited him in the thoroughfare designated by the puzzling letter.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as he came abreast of a dwelling at which he stared with a quizzical smile on his face. "It's the home of my old friend, Mrs. Donovan, the widow of the oil magnate. What Norma can want with me is another riddle."

He went up the broad steps of the elegant house and rang the bell. The door opened with a promptness that amused Abernathy, and he wondered if his advance upon the mansion had not been seen. The young girl who admitted him was reticent, for she did not speak, but led him to a parlor alongside the main hall and left him amid its exquisite furnishings.

"The whole thing is queer," thought Abernathy. "I haven't seen Norma for a whole year, but here she invites me to her house, intimating that she has some business on hand that may redound to my interest. A rich widow isn't to be picked up every day, but for all this, I mustn't lose sight of Lemora."

In the midst of his cogitations the opposite door opened slowly, and a brilliant-looking woman on the sunny side of thirty swept smilingly forward. Blake rose with a responsive smile and held out his hand.

"Welcome, dear friend!" exclaimed Norma Donovan. "You seemed to have exiled yourself for a whole year. There! don't seek forgiveness, for I mignt be implacable. How well you are looking. Your face seems to have the rare Continental tan, or have you been all the time among the Highlands?"

Abernathy flushed with delight. She was the same creature of other days, and he doubted not that she was striving to make a conquest of his heart. But there was Lemora, and he resolved not to fall a victim to the widow's blandishments.

He replied in a strain of gayety, and Mrs. Donovan took a seat on the luxurious settee beside him.

"I have sent for you for a purpose," she suddenly resumed. "My letter must have proved a trifle mysterious to you——"

"I'll admit it did," interrupted Abernathy. "You women are partial to mysteries."

"Say you so, laggard?" laughed the beautiful widow. "You can give me an account of your travels later on."

"Which I shall be delighted to do," was the response.

"I have sent for you to introduce you to a friend, a mutual friend, I hope," pursued Mrs. Donovan.

"Which is very clever of you, I'm sure."

"Yes?"

Norma Donovan rose and swept with her majestic figure from the room. Blake Abernathy leaned back and for a moment contemplated his surroundings.

"Going to introduce me to a mutual friend?" he though. "Then she has no designs upon me."

He waited ten minutes, when he saw the door swing wide, and once more the captivating widow of the late oil magnate stood before him. But this time she was not alone.

"My dear Mr. Abernathy," began Norma, as Abernathy sprang to his feet. "Permit me——"

The introduction was never finished, for in the bright glare of the parlor he stood face to face with Edith Middleton!

There are times in a man's life when his senses, under some terrible impulse or excitement, seem to leave him. The whole room and its luxuriousness appeared to swim before Blake Abernathy's eyes. The last person whom he wanted to meet in that room stood before him, her face tense and her eyes piercing him like a brace of venomous arrows.

Edith did not move. Norma, with a quick gesture, turned and flitted out of sight, and he was alone with his Nemesis. Well did he recall their last meeting. His thoughts went back to the French capital where her last words had rung in his ears, burdened with the hate of a lifetime, and before she spoke he felt that it was the crisis of his life.

Why had Norma leagued herself with this woman? He had heard that a coldness existed between them, but some strange cords had drawn them together, and Norma had baited him to the trap of vengeance.

Edith had never looked so beautiful in his eyes. In the full glow of rich womanhood, nerved, as he knew, by the spell of wrong, a deadly wrong, which he himself had inflicted, he could only gaze into the liquid depths of her eyes and wonder what those quivering lips would say. All at once Middleton's wife advanced a step. Abernathy looked at her hands, but they clutched nothing.

"So," said Edith, "you have come back? Fleeing like a coward from the shadow of justice, you have landed on the shores of your birth and I look once more into the face of the real murderer!"

Each word seemed to fall from her tongue like a drop of molten lead into water.

"It was all your work," she went on, before the words that fought one another within him could form themselves intelligently upon his tongue. "Did you think you could escape me? Did you think that no eye was on the alert, that you could quit Paris without having some one on your track? Fool!" She laughed derisively. "The wolf can escape his hunters, the lion can reach his lair and die there when his time comes without feeling the deadly shaft. The rattlesnake, after striking her victim, can creep back to her den and escape vengeance, but as for you, Blake Abernathy, you cannot escape the woman whose dearest kin you have wronged. I shall not turn the chapters of your book of life. I have read them all in the bitterness of my soul and in tears of sorrow. You struck me in the most vulnerable part of my heart. I have searched for you across a continent. I have been disowned because in my desire for vengeance I would not bare my soul to my husband. But enough! What have you to say?"

With the eyes of this beautiful creature upon him, what could he say?

"The door is locked," abruptly exclaimed Edith. "Norma locked it when she went out. I have picked up thread after thread till I hold all in my hands. I have woven the whole into a cord strong enough to hang a thousand devils like you. Norma tells me that you have but to open the drawer in yon stand to find writing materials. Set yourself to the task which you know is yours. You can write out the confession in ten minutes. I will wait that long. What then? I see that query in your look. When you have finished I will proceed."

Blake Abernathy looked at the woman in the middle of the room and cursed her in the depths of his guilty soul.

CHAPTER XIX.
LIGHT AT LAST.

What could he do? Search as he might the eyes before him he could find no mercy therein. Edith faced him with quiet but determined mien. He had been cornered at last.

Abernathy thought of a thousand things and of as many subterfuges; his brain worked with more than lightning rapidity. He had schooled himself in the art of deception, but he could not see any way out of the trap but compliance with the merciless demands of this one woman.

Beating down the curses that rose to his lips he walked over to the table and sullenly sat down. He knew that she was watching him with the ire of a whelp-robbed tigress.

His hand found the little drawer and drew it open. Sure enough writing materials greeted his eyes. Mechanically he relieved the receptacle of a sheet of paper and pen and ink. But bend himself to the task against which he had set his head in more than one hour of cogitation he could not.

"Go on!" said Edith at his side.

Abernathy turned his head and looked at her.

"Is there no other way?" he asked.

"None!"

"But, woman——"

"Proceed!" interrupted Yost Middleton's wife. "This is the hour for which I have longed."

He picked up the pen and poised it over the sheet of paper.

"It is the confession or death where you sit!" fell upon his ears.

In another moment his hand was moving back and forth over the paper. She watched him but said nothing more. When he reached the bottom of the page he pushed the paper from him and once more caught that implacable eye. Edith bent over and silently read what he had written.

"It is enough," she said in low, but tense tones, "Now sign."

Abernathy dashed his name at the bottom of the writing and fell back.

"We must have a witness," spoke Edith, and touched a little bell on the table.

Norma Donovan glided into the room. Middleton's wife pointed to the writing and looked at Norma with a glitter of triumph in her eyes.

"Mr. Abernathy has just signed," said she. "You will please witness his signature, dear."

The oil king's widow scrawled her name near Abernathy's and dropped the pen. Edith blotted the signatures and folding the document, placed it in her bosom.

"That is all, Norma," she said. "You have called up Mulberry street?"

"The gentleman is in the hall now!"

Abernathy started and his face went

ashen. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

"It was not to be thus," he managed to stammer.

"I made no conditions," relentlessly replied Edith. "Do you think the sworn vengeance of a lifetime would stop here?"

He could not answer.

"In a moment, Norma," continued the American's wife, turning to her friend, and the widow glided away.

"Is not my act enough?" cried Abernathy, squirming in his seat. "I will go away. I will put a sea between us, I will never darken your path again, I——"

"No!" broke in the cold voice of the wronged woman. "You forget that the dead still sleeps unavenged. You must not think that Justice is to be robbed of her victim because you have written a confession wrung from the blackest heart in all Christendom. What a short memory you must have, Blake Abernathy."

"But woman, Edith——"

"Don't speak my name with the tongue that would have sworn away the life of the innocent! I will not have it. Though you lost all that was dear to me, the love of a husband, the raptures of a happy home, the respect of society—I might almost add, my hope of Heaven. No! I have steeled my heart, a woman's though it be—against the very mention of mercy."

"But my confession will take away the cloud that envelops him," pleaded Abernathy.

"I know that."

"Then is that not enough?"

Edith did not reply, but struck the bell again and the door swung ajar.

"Come!" said Edith Middleton.

A plainly dressed man strode into the room. Abernathy faced him white to the chin.

"That is the man!" said Edith, in thrilling tones, as her quavering finger covered the man in the chair. "That is the man who killed the supposed victim of Mason Marx."

The man from Mulberry street glanced from Edith to Abernathy.

"Do you want proof? I have it here, his confession with the ink hardly dry upon it," and Edith's hand rested on her bosom. "That is Blake Abernathy!"

The man at the table rose and held out his hands.

"I am Abernathy," said he, biting off the words in bitterness as he glared at Edith, and then he laughed. "There's many a slip between cup and lip, woman."

Edith, with the semblance of a smile at her lips, saw his escorted from the room. As the door closed upon her enemy she tottered forward and sank into the vacant chair.

"Oh, God! I thank Thee!" welled from her throat, as she clasped her hands. "Now I can unburden my heart of its long-kept secret."

She was there silent at the little table when Norma stole back into the room. The widow touched Edith lightly on the shoulder. A white face was upturned to her, but the eyes did not seem to observe.

"Edith, dear?"

Mrs. Middleton broke into a discordant laugh which drove every vestige of color from the widow's face. There was a scream and a sudden flight on Norma's part. Something had given way in Edith's nature. She laughed and beat upon the table with her bare white hands till the whole house seemed to ring with her madness.

It was past the midnight hour when the door of Norma Donovan's mansion opened to admit a man whose eyes shot out a question that startled her very soul.

"You have sent for me?" said the man. "I have been roused from my slumbers by your imperative call. What is it you want of me, woman?"

"Come," answered Norma. "She is quiet now and asks for you."

"She?" was the echo. "Don't trifle with me. I know no one in this house but yourself."

"You are not the only one for whom I have sent," Norma replied. "The other man is with her now."

Yost Middleton looked at the widow like one in a trance.

"The—other—one?" he cried.

"Yes."

He permitted himself to be led into a darkened chamber at one side of which was a couch. Middleton perceived a form thereon and beside it a man was bending forward. Norma's hand turned on more light and the next moment Middleton uttered a tigerish cry. The man at the couch turned and stood face to face with him.

"What deviltry is this?" cried Middleton. "Why have you brought me face to face with that wretch, you, Norma Donovan, of all women?"

The man who heard folded his arms and stepped back with his gaze centered upon Edith's husband. Middleton approached the bed with measured strides. The dainty lace pillows shrouded the face of his wife, a face which for a year of agony had not left him for a moment. Edith's eyes were raised to his and her lips seemed to move with words which had no sound.

"Yost?" she said, and a white hand crept forward and was gently raised to him.

"I have reached the threshold of my secret," said Edith, at last. "I can now unburden my heart and tell you all."

He did not speak.

"When I rescued you from the Apaches of Faria, Yost," she went on, "and pressed my lips to your forehead, I almost broke my vow."

"Were you that woman?" he groaned.

"Yes," with a bitter smile. "The light which I have searched for has broken at last. My trail of vengeance has ended. Now, if you will listen to me——"

Middleton raised his hand and covered Mason Marx who was like a statue in his presence.

"Remove that man first!" he cried. "You forget that he is the cause of it all, he, a man who once stood at the bar of justice, but who escaped through chicanery——"

"Wait," said Edith, sitting up. "He shall listen to the story of the past, of my past and his. I swear to you, Yost, that he is guiltless of crime. I kissed him and I shall kiss him again in your presence. Look at both of us. You have never had this opportunity before now. What, do you start? Hold out your hand to him, Yost. This man is my brother!"

Middleton recoiled bloodless to the temples.

"Your brother, Edith?" he cried. "Heaven forgive both of us!" and he sank at the foot of his wife's bed.

CHAPTER XX.

EDITH'S STORY.

It was several days after the events just recorded. Edith Middleton, seated in the luxurious parlor of her old home, was looking into the face of her husband. The light fell softly over them, revealing their care-worn faces, but faces radiant once more with love and hope for the future.

"The one hidden chapter of my life I shall now reveal," said Edith. "I have come to the threshold of that secret which I have guarded so long. I approach it with mingled feelings of pity for yourself, Yost, and shame for me. You have always believed that I was the only child of Maurice Secours, for under that name you wooed and won me in the city of the Creoles. But Secours is not my real name. I lost my parents of the dread yellow fever, and when but a small child was adopted by the Secours, under whose care I grew to womanhood, and thus met you, to whom I gave the fullness of my love.

"I had a brother, my junior by two years. My recollections of him were faint. He appeared to me like a flitting vision, a vision which came but seldom to me. When I was fourteen, an old French lady confided to me the secret of his existence. She did not know what had become of him, for after the catastrophe in our family he disappeared, and I believed we were never to meet again. The same old dame also said that on my brother's arm was a birthmark by which I might some day recognize him. I lived for a while in hope, but that feeling at last gave way to despair.

"To you, my dear husband, I never revealed this family secret. Had I done so, as perhaps was my duty, the gulf which afterward tossed between us might never have lifted a single billow.

"One night in New Orleans—it was the year before our wedding—the mystery which surrounded the personality of my brother was singularly revealed. I will not burden you with how it came about, but suffice it to say that I discovered the marked arm, and knew that I was sister to the man called Mason Marx. We agreed to keep to ourselves the relationship that existed between us. He stood in the old church and witnessed our marriage and pressed my hand as we passed out. The years passed. I was happy in your love, and now and then I secretly met my brother, at times in the company of Blake Abernathy, whom I believed was throwing about him a coil of evil.

"This man Abernathy once aspired to my hand, but I rejected him, and his love, if love really animated his soul, turned to the bitterest hatred. Under the malign influence of my enemy Mason was plunged into the depths which finally brought him to the bar of justice charged with murder. The news fell upon me like a thunderbolt from a clear blue sky. At first I thought of laying the whole thing before you and opening the hidden chapter in my book of life, but, womanlike, I hesitated. I could not believe that Mason was guilty of the heinous crime. I had reason to think that Blake Abernathy was the murderer, and certain detective machinery which I set to work out of my ample means confirmed my suspicions.

"I resolved to leave no stone unturned for Mason's acquittal. I hired the best criminal lawyers in the United States. I stopped at nothing when it came to finances. I was ever present at the exciting trial, all the time avoiding publicity as much as possible, but keen eyes penetrated my mask, and gossip did the rest.

"Mason was set free, but the guilty remained to be punished. When I stood before you that awful night which changed the whole channel of our lives and darkened our skies, it was for a moment on my tongue to break my vow of secrecy and tell you all, but I did not. I went out into the world with your curse upon my head, with a belief in your heart that I was unfaithful, because I met Mason at various places and even supplied him with money."

"But you never lost my love, dearest," said Middleton, as he pressed his lips reverently to his wife's marble brow.

"Deep in my heart I believed this," smiled Edith. "I felt it when I turned from you in the park opposite your hotel in Paris and heard you imploringly call my name. That moment was the bitterest struggle my soul had yet undergone. Blake Abernathy, with base designs against Lemora, the sweet girl who came into our lives by adoption, followed me to Europe. I was informed of his arrival on the Continent at the moment he set foot upon it. Mason was at his heels. He wanted to take revenge upon the man who had brought him within the shadow of the electric chair, but I reminded him of my oath to accomplish vengeance, and he was content to assist me as I directed.

"Link after link in the chain of evidence I forged against this man. He came into my life more than once. It was Lemora who almost took his life in our rooms at the Hotel Pictus. Had she succeeded I would have been baffled. When at last Blake Abernathy returned to this country I was informed by Mason, and the next vessel bore me homeward. It was with unfeigned pleasure that I felt that on these shores I should bring about the one great purpose of my life. I drew Mrs. Donovan, the Norma of your acquaintance, into my confidence and in her mansion I set the trap into which my quarry walked. You can imagine the astonishment of that man when he found himself face to face with his Nemesis. I forced from him, ere I handed him over to the hounds of Justice, the confession of his guilt. It is here," and Edith drew from her bosom a folded paper which she placed in her husband's hands. "The life which Mason was accused of taking went out by the hand of Blake Abernathy. I had not divined wrongly. My sleuths had not played their cunning game for naught. I did not ask Blake Abernathy for that confession till every thread of this tangled skein of blood was firmly in my hands. And when I clutched that paper I knew I could come to you and ask forgiveness."

"Which you have, my wife!" cried Middleton.

"My story is done," pursued Edith, leaning forward for the kiss which was not withheld. "The secret which I have kept darkened our lives, but let us hope that forever and a day the bright sunlight of love will dissipate every shadow and remove the memory of the months of our trials. There is yet another who should be paid for his villainy," she cried. "Shall I leave him to you, Yost?"

"You mean Stokes?"

"Yes, the man who abducted Lemora from out pension, and who sought to blight her life forever by making her his wife."

"Then," said Middleton, "you do not know?"

A look of mystery camé into Edith's eyes. Middleton drew a newspaper toward him and handed it to his wife with his finger indicating a certain paragraph.

"The mills of the gods grind slowly," said he, with a smile, "but none of the grist escapes their implacable burrs.

Edith read in silence.

"The man who was found dead in the vacant house in Lemoire street on the 12th, has been identified as Barry Stokes, an ex-valet and a man-about-town. The remains little doubt that he was murdered by some one who may have decoyed him to the place. His pockets had been rifled, and it was by the merest chance that his identity was established by one of the curious visitors to the morgue."

Edith handed the paper back to her husband, and her eyes sought the window.

"Look!" said Middleton, as he pointed to her portrait on the wall. "You see that you smile upon me once more."

She uttered a little cry of joy. When last she stood in that room the portrait had been turned to the wall and the exile of her life had begun. Now she stood once more in the frame with her old beauty as radiant as ever, and the lips that had spoken her banishment were pressed to her temples.

At this juncture the door slowly opened and Lemora in spotless white stood before the pair.

"Come, dear!" cried Middleton, holding out his hands in genuine transports of delight. "The sun is shining again."

The beautiful girl rushed forward and threw herself upon Yost Middleton's bosom. Edith's eyes swam in a joyous mist.

"Mason said he would be here tonight!" cried Lemora, looking into Middleton's face.

"And Mason shall be welcome, child," was the response. "I understand. By my life, you look like a bride already!"

"All but the orange blossoms!" cried Lemora, returning the kiss she had just received.

A few days later the beautiful girl stood at the altar of happiness and spoke the vows which united her to Mason Marx, and the last cloud which had darkened more lives than one disappeared forever.

And while the wedding bells rang, the iron doors of a great prison opened for a man who was destined to spend the remainder of his life shut out from humanity, save his voiceless keepers, and in the horror of his cell Blake Abernathy, who had played for high stakes and lost, could gnaw the bitter file of remorse and dream of the bride who was another's.

The old beautiful world came back to Edith Middleton. Once more she drew society to her feet in adoration. Once more she really lived, and as the days went by the full harvest of an interrupted love was garnered.

One day Middleton entered Edith's room with a chubby babe in his arms. The little one held out his hands to the charming woman and was taken to her bosom. And standing in the golden sunshine which touched but to inspire happiness, Edith kissed Lemora's babe and forgot the one great secret of her life.

The End.

Deaf Man's Alarm Clock.

"Can I patent a fine idea?" asked a man of a patent attorney in Nassau street.

"Sure! What is it?"

"It is an alarm clock for deaf men. You see, I'm totally deaf, but I have to get up at eight o'clock every morning. All the ordinary alarm clocks in a jewelry store wouldn't waken me, so I have invented one that will. It is very simple. My room faces the east, and on the window I have a black curtain. In this curtain I have made a hole at such an angle that when the sun rises and beats upon that window the hole lets in a tiny stream of light. It shoots in as straight as an arrow and hits the wall about a foot above my head, and at eight o'clock that arrow of light hits me plump on the right eye. Of course an intense ray of light striking on the eye in a perfectly dark room will awaken the soundest sleeper at once. Now at this season of the year the sun rises a little earlier each morning; so each night before I retire I just lower the curtain about an eighth of an inch. When the days are growing shorter I raise the curtain a bit. In that way always at eight o'clock I am aroused."

"Do you want to patent the curtain?"

"Oh, no, just the hole," replied the inventor. "If other people make holes in their curtains I want to collect royalties."

That Was Evident.

This one is told about an East End dancing class. There was a young woman who thought a good deal about ancestry and descent, and there was a young man who thought that all such stuff was snobbish. The two sat out a dance together, and the girl mounted her hobby almost at once.

"What was your father?" interrupted the young man.

"Father was a gentleman."

"Ha! But what did he do for a living?"

The young man thought that smart, but the girl came right back.

"What was your father?" she asked.

"My father raised hogs."

"I see he did. But what did he do for a living?"

A Poverty-Stricken Crowd.

Visitor (at poorhouse)—Where did that fine-looking pauper come from?

Superintendent—The city. He owns the St. Fashion Flats.

"My goodness! Why is he here?"

"He charges such high rents that they have been empty since the second year."

"Hum! He seems to be on familiar footing with a good many of the other paupers."

"Yes, they are the people who were his tenants the first year."

"The boys played a good one on Old Pete the other day. They bet him there was a chap over at the Inn that he couldn't make throw up his hands."

"Waal, did Old Pete win?"

"No. When he got over there he found the chap was an armless wonder in a side show."

The Third-Flat Ghost

By George Weymouth

"There," he said, "that settles it."

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CHAPTER IV.

"YOU THINK HE IS GUILTY!"

PROFESSOR T. BURlingham Quincy, the ghost hunter, and Police Captain Butler, now entered the library. They were waiting for Miss Dudley, who had just received the third letter from the dead man. She had promised to bring Kirkland Bliss with her.

"I don't want to take this case out of your hands, Captain," said Quincy, "but I think it is time to let Bliss know the evidence we have against him."

"I'm not a bit proud, Professor. You may have the case and welcome to it, if you can only find the key to the mystery."

"Then I will ask our visitor a few questions, if you have no objections, and if I seem to wander from the point, you will be good enough not to manifest any surprise."

"That will be all right."

"I really do not expect to get any additional information from either of them, you know. If Bliss is guilty he will not betray himself; if he is innocent he is more ignorant of the matter than we are. But I am beginning to see a glimmering of daylight, and I want to confirm my half-formed theory."

Professor Quincy touched the bell, and the noiseless negro approached in his usual wraithlike way, with his invariable question:

"Yas, sah?"

"There is a taxicab coming, Pomeroy Nebuchadnezzar Jones."

"Yas, sah."

"You will bring the visitors here, and serve tea, if you please."

"Yas, sah?"

"You have always noticed, Butler," said the Professor, as the negro vanished, "that when strangers meet there is nothing that promotes a feeling of friendliness as quickly as a cup of tea—or its equivalent, which may be a pinch of salt, or a glass of wine, or a crust of bread, or a pipe of peace, according to the time and place."

"Mistah Bliss and Miss Dudley," announced the negro, throwing open the door of the library.

When Captain Butler had made the formal introductions, the four gathered at the library table and the colored man served tea and wafers.

"Now," said Professor Quincy, "let us see the letter."

"What letter?" asked Kirkland Bliss.

"The last letter from Juan Duprez," said Quincy, softly.

"You will forgive me for not telling you about these letters, Kirkland," Miss Dudley looked at the young man nervously, "but I promised Captain Butler not to. He thought it best not to worry you."

"I see you are really a remarkable girl, Miss Dudley," said the Professor, before Bliss could answer. "You are able to keep a secret. But I am sure Mr. Bliss will pardon you, for we are now prepared to let him into our confidence. Excuse me while I read this letter."

He glanced hastily over the blue sheet of note paper, and then read aloud:

"LAND OF SHADES,
"5 p. m. (Earth Time).

"My Darling Elizabeth: I am greatly perturbed on account of Kirkland Bliss. I see that already police suspicion is resting on him. He was criminally careless to hide the pistol in so obvious a place. I have only the kindest feeling for him. Over here we drop all the hatreds and jealousies which darken life on the mortal plane.

"If the missing key has not been discovered, you may find it in Kirkland's clothes closet. It is at the far end of the closet, under a green hat box on the top shelf. You would better get it and throw it away.

"Beloved, I may not be able to write to you again. I must be on about my business in this new life. But be of good cheer. I am happy, and assured of your undying love, I will wait for you with patience.

"If Kirkland is hanged for my murder, tell him I will meet his soul at the very gallows and do what I can to comfort him in his passage through the dark borderland of that unhappy portion of the world invisible which has been set apart for murderers.

"Thine through the unending years,
"JUAN DUPREZ."

When Professor Quincy concluded this extraordinary letter a silence fell on the startled group. Elizabeth Dudley had buried her face in her arms, and her shoulders were shaken by soundless sobs. Kirkland Bliss, with blanched face and dilated eyes, stared from one to the other.

"What devil's joke is this?" he asked huskily, at last.

"Perhaps you would better read the first two letters, Mr. Bliss," said Quincy, "and then you will know nearly as much about it as we do. Now this one was received at eight o'clock this morning, before the discovery of Juan's body."

The young man took it with trembling fingers. But when his eyes fell on the dead man's peculiar handwriting, which must have been familiar, he recovered his nerve almost immediately. As he read the lines of his face grew hard and determined. He was still pale, but his attitude expressed courage.

He finished the mysterious letter without comment and then reached for the second. When he had read this, too, he handed them back to the Professor, and looked with grave thoughtfulness at the teacup before him.

"I see the trend of these diabolical letters," he said, slowly, "although I do not understand the mystery of their origin. They were apparently written by Juan Duprez, and since his death?"

He raised his eyes and gazed questioningly at the police captain.

"You know as much about the letters as we do, Kirkland."

"And you found my glove in his room?"

"I found this," said the captain, taking a man's glove from his coat pocket.

"It is mine. I missed it this morning, as I started to work. Its mate is in my overcoat pocket at the present moment."

"You don't know how it came to be by the side of Juan's bed?"

"I do not.- And the pistol he refers to —did you find that?"

"Yes, in your chiffonier, precisely where he said. And I found it before Bess received the second letter. Now doesn't that beat you?" The captain turned to Quincy with puzzled face and eyes which held a hint of terror. "Wouldn't that beat you, Professor. Juan wrote this letter. And Juan had been dead eight hours before I found that gun. Yet he seems to know about it, and refers regretfully to the fact that police suspicion rests upon him. And I'll bet you anything we will find the key exactly where he says it is."

"Then he must have hidden it there himself!" cried Kirkland Bliss.

Professor Quincy smiled to himself at this suggestion.

"That would be a possible thing, because the key was lost before he was killed. But," and the captain shook his head, "he couldn't have hidden the pistol in your room, because he never moved after he was shot."

"Then whoever killed him has planned all these ingenious clews in order to throw suspicion upon me."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Captain Butler. "There might be something in it."

"You forgot the letters," said Quincy. "You all agree, and I agree with you, that Juan wrote the letters himself. The theory of a third party as murderer is untenable."

"Then you mean to say," began Kirkland, his eyes flaming with wrath, "that I——"

"I merely mean to say that no mysterious third party is guilty," interposed the Professor calmly, "and I advise you to keep cool. Your own good common sense if you will exercise it, must convince you that suspicion rests upon you with a heavy hand. There is your glove at the murdered man's bedside. The recently fired pistol in your room is loaded with the same kind of bullets as the one that passed through his body. Then there is the quarrel, and the——"

"The quarrel! Oh, I had forgotten about that. Did you know I quarreled with Juan last night in the hallway?" asked Kirkland, looking at the big policeman.

"Yes, I knew it. But I would advise you to be careful what you say. Your admissions may be used against you."

"Oh, confound it, I refuse to be careful," Kirkland cried. "I did quarrel with him. I told him I'd wring his neck. I'm not going to conceal anything. You don't think for a minute I'm guilty?"

Captain Butler was silent, but he gazed sadly at the young man.

Kirkland turned to Miss Dudley.

"Bess," he said brokenly; "Bess, you do not believe it, do you?"

"No, no, no!" cried the young woman. She raised her pretty, tear-stained face, and her eyes were shining with love and trust. "I know you are not guilty, and I do not believe the good God will let you become the victim of this dark conspiracy against your life."

"And write!"

"You must have conspirators in order to make a conspiracy," suggested the Professor.

"Oh, you think he is guilty!" she cried indignantly. "But what do you know about it? You are merely on the surface of the case. You have not known Kirkland for years, as I have. You think him capable of killing a man asleep in his bed! It is ridiculous."

"My dear young lady, I have not announced my opinion of this strange case. I merely suggest that suspicion points toward Mr. Bliss. I am not a detective. I am a psychologist, and my interest originally lay in the authorship of these letters which pretend to come from the Land of Shades, wherever that is."

CHAPTER V.

"THE FATHER OF ALL VILLAINS."

"As to the letters," said Kirkland Bliss, "they were clearly written to throw suspicion on me. They were as clearly written by Juan himself, and since a dead man can not really write letters, they must have been written before his death."

"I can't see how you figure that out," objected the policeman. "He seems anxious not to have you punished. He warned Bess here to remove the glove, and he warned her to take the pistol away, and now he tells her about the key."

"The writer could not reasonably have imagined that these letters would have fallen into the hands of the police. We must take that into consideration, too," said Professor Quincy. "I will venture to say that if Miss Dudley had had time to think before she handed the first letter to the captain here that she would never have allowed him to see one of them. They were meant for her eyes only."

"That is true," confessed the girl. "I have been sorry ever since that I showed the letter to you, Captain Butler. I know Kirkland is not guilty, and"—she looked around defiantly—"if I had known at eight o'clock this morning all that I know now, do you know what I would have done?"

"Captain Butler shook his head. "I never undertake to guess what a girl might do."

"Well, I know what you would have done." Professor Quincy looked at Bess with an encouraging smile.

"What?" she asked.

"You would have removed the glove, in the first place. Then you would have taken the weapon back and laid it on the bed, near Juan's hand. And you would have put the key back in the lock, on the inside of the door."

"Indeed I would," she declared.

"Then, as fast as the letters came you would have burned them up, and have kept the secret locked up in your own stout little heart," he continued. "Then the death would probably have passed without question as a suicide, and not even Kirkland would ever have known the network of circumstances that surrounded him."

"I am sorry I did not have sense enough to do it," she sighed.

"That is what the writer counted on," said the Professor. "He counted on your courage and good sense."

"But I don't see the object of the letters, then," objected the captain.

"No? Well, I do, and if my theory is correct our friend Juan is the most supernaturally clever fiend that ever inhabited this blundering world. His conception was worthy of the infernal one himself."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"I mean that I take off my hat to Juan Duprez, the father of all villains. He has reduced vengeance to a science. He was probably crazy, but he was a genius, and his courage was only surpassed by his diabolical cunning."

"Then you know something—you have solved the riddle?" exclaimed Captain Butler. In his eagerness he rose from the table, upsetting a teacup as he did so.

"I am beginning to understand what happened," said the Professor, coolly. "But there are some details to be settled yet. Pardon me if I do not explain my theory at present. I will have my servant remove the tea things, and then I have something to suggest to you."

He rang the bell and the darky stood at the door.

"Yas, sah."

"Clear the table, Pomeroy Nebuchadnezzar Jones, and then come back here."

"Yas, sah."

There was a strained silence in the room while the man removed the dishes, and they waited impatiently for his return.

"Now, Pomeroy Nebuchadnezzar Jones, you may possibly be able to do a service for this young lady, and I know your generous nature well enough to believe that you will not refuse."

"Yas, sah."

"My friends," said the Professor, "the invisible world is as much a mystery to me as it is to you. I have studied occult phenomena for years, and I may say that the best authenticated and most coherent

messages that come from the land beyond are communicated, not through clairvoyant trance mediums, but through automatic writings. You perhaps are more or less familiar with the experiences narrated by Mr. Stead?"

"I've heard of him," admitted the captain. "I remember reading a piece about him in the Sunday paper one time. He gets letters from some spirit named Julia."

"He's a big London editor," said Kirkland Bliss.

"Didn't he write a book once—'If Christ Came to Chicago?'"

"I see you know about him," smiled the Professor. "Well, my black friend here, Pomeroy Nebuchadnezzar Jones is psychic, and I have trained him in the principles of automatic writing. He cannot read nor write himself, so whatever communication he may receive in this case will come from sources outside of his own consciousness."

"From what source, then?" asked the policeman.

"If I could answer that question I would hold the master key that unlocks all mysteries," said the Professor gravely. "I do not attempt to explain causes. I merely study phenomena."

The negro had been standing patiently, as if all this was beyond his comprehension, and when Professor Quincy seated him at the table and placed a tablet in front of him and a lead pencil in his right hand he stared in front of his indifferently.

"Now, Pomeroy Nebuchadnezzar Jones!" commanded Professor Quincy sharply.

"Yas, sah."

"Close your eyes!"

"Yas, sah."

"And write!"

"Yas, sah."

There was a moment's breathless silence, and then the pencil, held rigidly, almost awkwardly, in the black hand began to move rapidly across the paper. There was no hesitation, no faltering. Line after line of almost microscopic script flowed from the pencil's point, and the black hand never paused until the sheet was full.

Then the hand grew limp, the pencil fell from its grasp, and the negro sat stiffly upright, and his eyes opened.

"Yas, sah," he said.

"Thank you, Pomeroy Nebuchadnezzar Jones," said the Professor, with grave courtesy, and as the negro retired he took up the tablet and tore off the top sheet.

His face wore a puzzled look as he studied the fine characters for a moment. Then his eyes brightened, and he looked around triumphantly.

"Portuguese!" he exclaimed. "And our friend Juan may have been a Portuguese, if one can judge from his name."

"He was," exclaimed Miss Dudley. "Is the letter from him?"

"From him? No!"

"Can you read it?" demanded the captain, impatiently. "What does it say?"

Professor Quincy had been studying the script closely.

"I am reasonably familiar with Portuguese," he said at last. "But it will take me some time to make a complete translation. Would you mind my telling you good night?"

"I'll not be able to sleep," grumbled the policeman, "unless I kno the next move in the game."

"You may have the solution to the riddle tomorrow, I think. There only remains to look over the scene of the tragedy, and to find the lost key which Juan says is hidden in the clothes closet. I will be over there at eight o'clock. If it will make your night easier, I am willing to promise you that the mystery will be solved to the complete satisfaction of everybody present."

"Well, I suppose we're bound to let you have your own way, so good night—and whether you really have the right answer to the puzzle or not, you've given us a very interesting evening."

So saying, Captain Butler shook hands with the Professor and escorted the two young people to the waiting taxicab.

"I am dying to know what is in that spirit letter, written in Portuguese," said Miss Dudley, as she leaned back in the car.

"I'm wondering whether he's a faker, or a real man of science. He indulges in a good deal of cheap claptrap," said Bliss.

"Well, we'll know tomorrow—maybe," sighed the policeman. "I've been working on this bloody case since eight o'clock this morning, and it is now nearly eleven. It just occurs to me that I'm tired. I wish I could sleep, but that will be impossible."

And to prove it was impossible, the big captain dropped his chin on his chest and immediately began to snore.

CHAPTER VI.
THE SHADOWS.

The two lovers in the cab discussed the dramatic events of the day in low tones, so as not to awaken the captain. So engrossed were they that they hardly noticed it when the machine slowed down, and the face of the driver appeared at the door.

"Listen!" he whispered.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Bliss.

"We are being followed."

"Nonsense. Who would follow us?"

"I don't know, boss. But there's a green car been after us ever since we left Queechy court. I first thought it was just an accident, but he waited for us all the time you were in Professor Quincy's house, and now he's trailing us again. I thought I'd ought to tell you."

"What's that?" grumbled the captain; "we are being followed. Now, what the —oh, I remember!"

"Here's the car, now," warned the chauffeur, as the green machine turned the corner and slowed down beside them, and a voice hailed them in the darkness:

"What's the matter? Broke down?"

"That you, Mullane?" asked the captain.

"It happens to be me."

"And is Billy with you?"

"I'm on the job, captain," answered another voice, presumably that of Billy.

"All right, boys. Wait a minute." He climbed stiffly out of the taxi. "These are two of my detectives," he said to the driver. "I am going with them. Good night, children. See you in the morning at eight. You will wait for me, Bliss, of course."

"Certainly. I'll be at home."

Having changed cars, the captain, now thoroughly awake, called on his two men for a report.

"We've been watching this guy all day," said Mullane. "He hasn't been up to anything suspicious till about nine o'clock, when him and the girl comes out and gets in the taxi. I thought he was going to try to make his getaway then, and I was about to pinch him. But Billy thought it was safer to follow him and find out where he went."

"Billy was right, that time; but it's a dangerous thing to let your man get in a taxicab and drive off. He's likely to give you the slip."

"Whachye been doing at Professor Quincy's?"

"Oh," said the captain, easily, "Quincy's a friend of mine and he's been doing some scientific work on the case. I've got it pretty well in hand, now, boys. If things break as I expect you'll have the whole story tomorrow, and it's the prettiest little mystery you ever saw."

"Bliss did it, of course?" questioned Mullane.

"You'll find out," said the captain, mysteriously. "I've done some mighty fine work on this case, boys. I'm not ready to spread my hand, however, till I draw one more card."

"I knew you'd get to the bottom of the case if anybody could," said Billy, who apparently was not above flattering his chief. "I never saw you fall down yet."

"Oh, well, Professor Quincy has been interested. I expect to get a little help from him," said the captain, modestly. And if the honest officer was inclined to take too much credit to himself in order to impress his assistants, he might be forgiven for his very human weakness.

The two cabs reached Queechy court at about the same time, and when the drivers were dismissed, Kirkland Bliss waited to speak to the policeman.

"You've been having me shadowed, captain?"

"Yes, my boy. It was a plain duty."

"Am I to be arrested?"

"Well, now, I don't know. I hope not."

"I tell you I'm not guilty. My mother does not even dream that there is any suspicion against me. It would break her heart to have a charge of murder brought against me. I am the only one she has in the world, and whether I deserve her good opinion or not, she thinks I am just about all right."

"I know how a mother feels, my boy. But as an officer I have a certain duty to perform. If I had not known you so well you would have been in jail before noon today. I have been waiting to get all the facts in the case before I made a move against you, hoping that something would turn up to show that you were not guilty."

"And everything that has turned up so far goes to show that I am guilty, doesn't it?"

"Well, I'm not going to commit myself tonight. I really ought to place you under arrest, but if I let you go until Professor Quincy gets through with his theatricals tomorrow, will you promise to be on hand?"

"I give you my word of honor not to run away."

"Well, then, lad, go on up and go to bed."

Nevertheless, after Bliss had disappeared in the hallway of his apartment building, Captain Butler issued stringent orders to his two detectives.

"He knows we suspect him, now, and he may try to escape during the night. Keep a close watch, front and back, until midnight. Then send for Dorgan and Ode to relieve you. If he gets away, somebody will suffer for carelessness."

"It would be simpler and safer to put him in a cell," said Mullane.

"Yes, that's true. But it would spoil my case. Besides, he is a fine boy, and he may not be guilty."

"They all say they're not guilty."

"Never mind, you do as I say," the captain commanded gruffly.

In the meantime, Professor Quincy in his library was translating the spirit message, if one may call it such, which had been received through the illiterate negro. The little man had a Portuguese dictionary open at his side, and with alternate frowns and smiles he worked away till after midnight. When he had finished there were four closely written pages, made from the single sheet filled with the negro's microscopic characters. And it we may exercise our privilege of looking over the Professor's shoulders, we are astonished to see that he has translated the Portuguese into French rather than English.

"There," he said aloud. "That settles it, if the facts fit in with this extraordinary communication, and I'll bet a million dollars they do. If Captain Butler could read this he would have a fit. I'll report the case to the next meeting of the Society, and it will be the sensation of the year.

He chuckled a little to himself, and then turned and waved his hand out through the open window.

"Well, Juan Duprez, my lad, we are fighting you with your own weapons. And if your dark spirit can see and understand what is happening here on earth, I'll bet another million that you are gnashing your teeth in hopeless rage."

This powerful story will be concluded in the next week's Ledger. Do not miss reading it. A lot of great and timely stories will appear in the Ledger during the coming months. Send in your subscription and you will find yourself repaid ten times over.

THE SERPENT'S TONGUE

By Augustin W. Breeden

BEAUTIFUL Emily Page was dead—dead after a single year of happy married life. In the room where she lay a scent of camphor ice and disinfectants battled with the odors of April in the Ozark Hills that came lovingly in through the open windows. The corpse lay near one of these windows, beautiful even in death, and a dozen quiet neighbor women lined the other three walls of the room. Through the doorway of a darkened bedroom to the right could be seen the figure of a man, sitting with his elbows on his knees and his face in his palms, in that tragic attitude as old as death and the human race. From time to time a deep, hollow sigh escaped the man, but mostly he sat absolutely mute and motionless.

Harvey Page had come into the hills solely because of Emily, whom he had met one summer at a normal school. He had stayed and become the principal of the grammar school in her native village of Gentryville just in order to get to teach with her, and at the beginning of the second term he had begged her to resign her position to become his bride. Then followed their year of love and loyalty and golden hopes, and then—this! Page moaned as his thoughts came round to this—a black yawning chasm which lay across his path—and Mrs. Porterfield, a large, portly lady in a shiny black alpaca, got up and closed the bedroom door. This was a signal for a general loosening of tongues, and a patter of subdued talk began to circulate about the room.

"She looks ez purty an' innocent ez a angel right out o' Heaven," murmured a little old woman from the depths of a slatted sunbonnet.

"She lived in Gentryville as a child and young lady nearly twenty years, and she was never talked about," sighed Mrs. Porterfield.

"An' her without a pa or ma, too, an' livin' with that crabbed old Professor uncle o' her'n, with his high-headed notions," said another woman, "poor little dearv."

"Well, it's certainly something to have never been talked about in a place like this, where so many girls have——" the speaker, a timid little lady who had lived in the town only two years, suddenly perceived that she had said quite enough—in fact, too much.

In the Ozarks, where every one is kin to every one else, it is not wise to make sweeping generalizations as to the moral atmosphere of any given locality. A half-dozen of the women present exchanged glances that were not good to see, and Dixie McDowell, a strapping mountaineer woman, who was supposed to live on a farm two miles up the river with her husband, but who really spent most of her days among the village gossips, flung back at the speaker in a high-pitched, angry tone. "If you're a-hintin' that Gentryville's any worse than other towns, Mrs. Hellman, I kin tell yo' you're wrong; an' people thet comes from furrin parts is jes' ez apt to be talked about ez us'uns here in the hills!"

"Hist!" cried two or three ladies, raising their hands in warning. "Hist, Dixie, you're talking too loud!"

But Dixie McDowell did not propose to subside. She lowered her voice a shade and said: "An' ez fer Emily Page there, say what yo' will, she tried fer five years an more to ketch my man."

"For shame! Dixie McDowell!" cried Mrs. Porterfield, indignantly. "You are simply jealous of this poor dead girl, because Budd McDowell admired her, just as we all did. But even if she had loved him in the past, she's dead now, and you are his wife. You ought to be ashamed to try to throw off on her!"

Before Mrs. McDowell could make any answer to this reproof, a hack drew up to the front gate, and the pallbearers filed quietly into the yard, and it was time to start to the cemetery.

The funeral that afternoon was the best attended that the little village of Gentryville had ever seen. All the school children were there; every store in the village was closed; and even Bill Carsons, the keeper of the little "blind tiger" which Emily Page and her sort had tried so hard to rout from the town, closed up his smelly little place and strolled doggedly after the last carriage of the procession. And more than one wagonload of mountaineers, people to whom Emily had always shown the greatest kindness, came that afternoon to the little rocky graveyard. "Yes, she shorely was a good girl," said one old woman; "she give my Sarie a checkered skirt a'most ez good ez new onct;" and a half-dozen echoed sadly, "She shorely was a good girl." Every one spoke her praises; it was one of those rare occasions when funeral enconiums are perfectly genuine.

As the mound of earth was being shaped up and the flowers placed upon it, a tall mountaineer rode to the graveyard, and, pushing into the crowd about the grave, passed a parcel to Mrs. Porterfield. It was a wreath of wild white violets, a flower so rare in the Ozarks that many of the villagers had never seen one before, and the giver was Budd McDowell. The mountaineer had hunted all the day before and all that day, and by great good luck had found enough for his mother to make this tiny wreath. Ten years before, when Budd was a bright, promising lad of seventeen, and sweet Emily Willard was a slim schoolgirl, he had once brought her, among many tokens of his constant worship, a bouquet of these rare flowers; and she had praised them so much that every April after that, until the April she was married, he had never failed to renew the gift. And now he was bringing her his last April token, a token of the best and noblest affection that had ever entered his life.

"Did you see what your man done?" asked Sallie Hearn, the "hired girl" of the village hotel, of her friend Dixie McDowell.

"Yes, I seed!" replied the angry spouse. "Hit ain't no business o' your'n, is it!" And so saying, she left the cemetery in high dudgeon.

When every one else was gone, Harvey Page still stood by the flower-banked grave. With that curious intensity of interest in details which marks our moments of violent emotions, he noted now that there were more wild flowers on that grave than there were cultivated ones. Each child from the school had brought its little token, and many a mountaineer girl had added a gaudy bouquet. Among the other beautiful offerings Page noted the wreath of rare white violets, and remembered that Emily had said that that was her favorite wild flower. In his heart he blessed the giver, whoever it might be. He mused as he stood there of the many times he and his loved Emily had roamed those blue-green hills together, during that happy year of their courtship and that other blessed year of their married life. But now the hills were hateful to him; for now they could only remind him that she, who had made them seem the very hills of Paradise, was no more. He meant to leave Gentryville the very next week, as soon as a tombstone he had ordered from a near-by city could be shipped and set up.

The monument came earlier than was expected, and three days later found Harvey Page back in his old home, five hundred miles away from that grave where his very life seemed to lie buried. He had intended not to return to the Ozarks until the following Christmas; but those blue-green hills kept calling him. "It is May in the Hills!" he would say, as if it were May nowhere else in the world. He would picture to himself the oak leaves getting big, and see the far, cool green reaches under the trees. Later he would say: "It is June in the Hills!" Then, after a moments' pause, if none of the home folks answered him: "The same moon is shining down there that is shining down here. It is shining on those words on that marble shaft: 'A True Friend', 'A

Faithful Wife,' 'The Sweetest Soul That Ever Trod the Ozark Hills.'" Thus he longed to see those hills again, and July found him back in Gentryville.

Meanwhile a tongue had been going, Dixie McDowell's; and it had set several other tongues going, which is the way with a wagging tongue. Still, so greatly was Emily loved in the village, that Dixie found comparatively few to listen to the dark calumnies she hinted at, and to bolster up her own word, she made bolder and bolder statements; for now that Page was gone, Emily had not a relative in the hills to defend her good name. Finally Dixie declared that she had in her possession a note which absolutely proved Emily to have been false to her husband, and that if it came to a test she could show it. And to get the moral support of a few of her friends she did show the note about among them, always warning them to keep it all a secret from her husband. She showed this note to Sadie Hearn, amongst others, and when Sadie begged her to let her keep it and show it to some more of their common friends, she readily granted the request.

The missive was indeed in the dead woman's handwriting and read as follows:

"June 4th, 1907.

"Dear Budd:—When you come down to Gentryville I want you to manage to meet me at Carr's Spring. You know how angry it would make the Professor if he knew I still met you secretly. I hate to be undutiful, when everybody thinks I am so good, but still I want you to keep coming just as you did before there was any barrier between us.

"EMILY."

It was the day after Dixie had given her friend the note that Page suddenly made his appearance unannounced in Gentryville. He had not been in town two hours before he felt that there was something in the air that he could not understand. The people he met looked at him in such a singular fashion; there seemed to be a sort of pity in their faces, which could hardly be merely the remnant of their sympathy or his bereavement. While he was eating dinner at the hotel, Sadie Hearn asked him abruptly if he knew Budd McDowell; and upon his answering that he knew him quite well, and that Budd and Emily had once been warm friends, the woman's manner was so naively mysterious and knowing, that he guessed at once that she knew something important, or, at least, something that she thought was important.

As soon as Page had finished his dinner he went at once to the cemetery, where he spent almost the entire afternoon. He seemed to draw comfort from sitting near that grave. And as he went into the stillness induced by a constantly repeated circuit of thought and memories, his wife seemed to come to him and lay her gentle hand upon his shoulder and bid him be comforted. But during the whole afternoon he kept worrying about that strange way people had looked at him, and about Sadie Hearn's strange manner; and on his way back to the village it was still uppermost in his mind.

That afternoon Page was invited out to supper with the Porterfields, and as he and Mr. Porterfield were smoking their cigars together on the front veranda, while the women folk cleared away the supper dishes, his host broached the subject that was worrying him so much.

"Professor," he began, awkwardly, "there's been some folks blabbing and trying to tell lies—about—you—since you've been gone. The ones that are talking are the scum of the place, and, of course, no respectable person believes anything they say," he added quickly, with growing confusion.

Page started to speak, but Porterfield interrupted him and continued: "Oh, what they've said is nothing very bad, Professor Page. I wouldn't pay any attention to any hint of it that I might hear made if I were you. A man can't afford to turn round and kick at every barking dog, you know."

"What are the nature of the charges?" asked Page, greatly worried by his friend's embarrassed manner. "Do they say I'm insane; they looked at me today as if they thought I was?" But before any answer could be made Mrs. Porterfield and her two daughters came out and the conversation was changed.

But Page hardly heard a word of the conversation that passed. The chatter of the two young women simply ran as an undertone to the theme of his thoughts, and good Mrs. Porterfield's efforts to draw him out and make him forget himself were all spent in vain. He was resolved to go to the bottom of this thing and find out what it was; and as soon as he returned to the hotel he asked Sadie Hearn point blank what all this talk that was flying about was. Now, he could not have asked a person more ready to answer him than Sadie. She was a woman who loved mischief above all things, and cared not a snap of her fingers whom it hurt, so long as she got the benefit of the excitement it created. She was waiting for Page's return with the full intention of broaching the subject in case he failed to do so, and at his first question she immediately handed him his dead wife's note, telling him not to read it until he was in his room.

"Don't try to lie to me, Budd McDowell!"

No words can describe the feelings of Harvey Page as he read this note. When he first opened it and saw that it was the handwriting of his darling Emily, a deep thrill of pleasurable anticipation ran through him like the thrill that the thirsty toper must feel as he raises the wineglass to his lips. There was a faint, half-pleasant odor about the yellow note, and he held it to his nostrils and drew it down into his lungs as if he were trying to absorb it into his inmost being. Then he read the note through. At first he was so entirely puzzled by it that he did not get any meaning from it at all. Then two things began to stand out to him: "Dear Budd" and the date. That date was nearly three months after their marriage. Here was some mistake. But no, he read the note over for the fourth time, and there were the damning words, "You know how angry it would make the Professor if he knew," etc. "I hate to be undutiful, but I want you to keep coming." It was unbelievable! It was a forgery! No, it was in Emily's own handwriting, and there was the date! So this was the price he had paid for marrying a mountaineer! They were all alike—there was no good in any of them! "Oh, curse her! Curse her!"

These last words were uttered aloud, and in the silence which followed them, the half-insane man heard some one moving just outside his door. He held the note in his hand and nervously folded it and unfolded it. That odor about it! That insipid odor! It made him sick! Perhaps it was the stale odor of dead white violets; he remembered now who the giver of that wreath had been. He would hate wild white violets to the day he died. "Oh, curse her! Curse her! Curse her!"

Again he heard that step outside the door, and this time suddenly flung it open and confronted the wide-eyed Sadie.

"What are you doing here, you damned witch?" he cried. "Do you think I'm going to blow my out brains for your amusement?"

Sadie started to flee, but he caught her roughly by the arm.

"Where did you get that note?" he asked, thrusting his face into hers.

"From Dixie McDowell," answered the trembling woman.

"Who gave it to her?"

"She stoled it out o' Budd's trunk. If he knowed she got it he'd kill her."

"Very well," said Page, releasing her arm. "Tell Budd McDowell I'm going to kill him the minute I lay eyes on him. Will you tell him that?"

By this time Mrs. Moore, the proprietress of the hotel, and four or five roomers, hearing the excitement, had dressed themselves hastily, and now appeared in the hallway.

"My wife didn't write that note!" cried Page, in a frenzy, addressing Sadie directly, but including all the others present as auditors. "You understand? The note is a forgery!" Page was suddenly struck with what to his frenzied mind appeared a very brilliant notion. "My wife didn't write that note!" he repeated. He had suddenly disowned Emily, even in his own mind, and he meant to go immediately to the graveyard and chisel out his name from hers and efface the words "A Faithful Wife" from that tombstone.

"Stand out of my way, please," he said, and disappeared hatless and coatless from the hotel.

"He's gone to kill Budd McDowell," whispered the frightened Sadie, and for the next hour the little shivering group stood about discussing the impending tragedy, while Sadie was busy trying to ring up the McDowells on a country telephone line.

When Page left the hotel, he went straight to a blacksmith shop around the corner, and, prying a plank loose, slipped in and secured a cold chisel and a small mallet. As he emerged from the shop and started toward the graveyard, the full moon was shining straight down from overhead, and as he climbed the hill past Carr's Spring, the whole town and the valley beyond it lay still and pale below him. The babbling of the waters of Carr's Spring almost drove him mad.

"Am I going insane?" he asked himself, coming to a sudden dead stop. "No, but I will be before morning," he added, starting on again.

A few moments later he entered the little graveyard, where the marble shafts gleamed like ghosts in the bright moonlight. He went straight to his wife's tomb. "I'll chisel out those words," he said, between clenched teeth, "and she may lie there under her damned multilated monument, and every one that passes by for the next fifty years can read of her infamy."

He raised the hammer and chipped off the first letter from the word "faithful;" then suddenly started back aghast at the thing he was doing. "But never mind," he said to himself aloud. "I'll go into the river as soon as the thing is done;" and with that he set to work in a frenzy of haste, like one who has struck a man a fatal blow and sets to work to kill him as quickly as possible.

A half-hour later he staggered from the graveyard like a drunken man and started on toward the river; but just outside the place his head suddenly began to swim, and he fell in the road and lay there for he did not know how long

(Continued on page thirteen.)

GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

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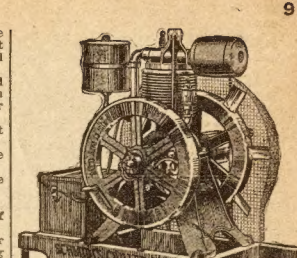

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Cop—You'll have to take that pup out. Dogs are not allowed in this park.
Stroller—That's not my dog.
Cop—He's not your dog? Why, he's following you around.
Stroller—Yes, sir. That's so; but so are you.

A Plausible Story.

Lady—Why are you wandering around the country. I should like to know, instead of staying at home and taking care of your family?

Tramp—You see, mum, my wife had a very good servant girl—a regular jewel, mum.

"That doesn't seem possible."

"There never was but one perfect girl, and my wife had her, mum."

"Mercy! What a lucky woman!"

"Yes, mum, so my wife often said. But, you see, mum, the girl didn't like me."

"She didn't?"

"No, mum. She said my wife would have to discharge her or me, so she discharged me."

"Oh, I see. Here's some money."

Consistent Enough.

"But," protested the stage manager, "don't you think it looks odd for you to wear your diamonds in the character of the deserted wife?"

"Oh, no," replied the actress, "you must have observed that I have selected for that purpose the very smallest and plainest diamonds I own."

A Dress Bargain.

Wife—Oh, such a bargain! I reached Bigg, Drive & Co.'s ahead of the crowd this morning, and got enough stuff for a perfectly elegant dress for one dollar and ninety cents.

Husband—Hoopla! You're an angel! What will it cost to get it made up?

Wife—Bout thirty dollars?

Violent Exercise.

"What's the trouble, old chap? Rheumatism?"

"No. I've gotten my muscles rather sore trying to shift overcoats often enough to keep up with the changes in the weather."

A Better Basis.

"You have captured one of our generals," said the South American commander.

"Yes," said the leader of the insurgents, "we have."

"We will exchange two colonels for him."

"Nix."

"Then two colonels and a captain."

"Nothing doing. You can have him however, for a can of condensed milk."

How He Paid Board Bill.

"I told you that dub was foolish to be courting so many girls."

"How did it turn out?"

"As you might expect. His expenses were so heavy that he got behind with his board and had to marry his landlady."

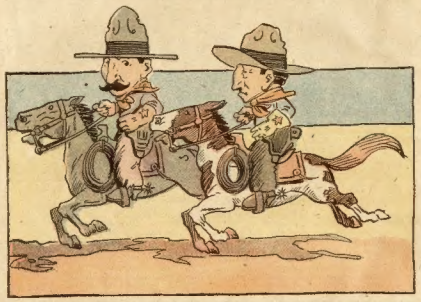
Mrs. Quizzer—I hear you're engaged to Miss Stumps. Are you actually in love with her?

Mr. Southhunter—Very much. She owns a hundred thousand acres of timber land and, really, she's the pineapple of my eye.

Unfailing Courtesy.

"What did that very polite man say when you called him a member of the Ananias Club? Did he exclaim, 'You're another'?"

"No, indeed. He smiled and said, 'Welcome, fellow member.'"



Hank Bitters (a prominent citizen of Oklahoma)—Goin' to the ball tonight, Ike?

Alkali Ike—I'd like to mighty well, Hank, but I can't. You see it is to be strictly a full dress affair, and I've lost one of my spurs.

Too Common Here.

"Lovely sunset tonight, Mrs. De Swell?"

"Mercy, I never look at an American sunset! They're so much more classy over in Italy, don't you know."

Suffragette Style.

First Little Girl—Don't you want a dolly that talks?

Second Little Girl—No, I want one that breaks windows.

A True Philanthropist.

Mr. Goodman—You should tell our doctor to call on the washerwoman's family.

Mrs. G.—Dear me! What's the matter there?

"Influenza, I think."

"Who told you?"

"No one; but I notice that only two of my handkerchiefs came back this week."

SUGGESTION FOR A SUMMER RESORT.

Where husband and wife could find comfort according to individual tastes.

Drug-Store Coffee.

Customer (at soda fountain)—Have you any coffee flavor?

Clerk (briskly)—Yes, sir.

"Does it taste like coffee?"

"Um—er—n-o, but it looks like coffee—perfect picture of it, sir."

Equipped.

"So you think your small son will have a literary career?"

"He can if he wants it. He can think up enough questions in a day to keep three or four columns of 'Answers to the Curious' going."

Mother Knew.

"Mother, I'm going to give a chafing dish party."

"Very well. I'll prepare some sandwiches. You'll be hungry after you get through trying to cook."

After a Fashion.

Church Member—Does your father always practice what he preaches?

Minister's Son—Yessum; before a mirror.

Out of Date.

"The Dillburys are old fashioned people."

"Yes, indeed. They are always trying to make both ends meet."

Inhuman.

"Upon what grounds do you seek a divorce?" asked the lawyer whom she had just retained. "Non-support, cruelty or—"

"Both," she cried, tearfully. "He would not support my passionate longing for a diamond necklace, and if that isn't cruelty I'd like to know!"

Help!

"I thought you had a trained nurse to wait on your wife?"

"So I have."

"And how you're looking for more help."

"Yes. I find I have to have three or four maids to wait on the trained nurse."

Canning Season.

"Why is it," asked the country cousin, "that you never come to see us unless you wish to take home a lot of fruit?"

"Now, please don't be cross," the city cousin pleaded, "we come whenever we can."

His Little Joke.

He—Yes, I pass most of my time between Boston and New York.

She—But I thought you were studying at Yale.

He—Well, that's between Boston and New York, isn't it?

As Fashion Goes.

Husband (holding up a bill)—Here's the bill for that last gown—$175. This must stop—you must wear less.

Wife—Goosie! You know well that the less I wear the more it costs!

Then He Moved.

Staylate (at 11:45 p. m.)—I've been looking for lodgings all the week.

Miss Weseigh—You seem to have found them at last.

His Advantage.

"I suppose even a rich man has his troubles."

"Yes; but he can always find somebody to take an interest in them."

Wanted—A Handhold.

Meandering Mike heaved such a deep sigh that his companion was moved to ask him what the matter was.

"I was just thinking about bad roads and the wonders of science," was the answer. "This earth is spinning around faster'n a railway train behind time."

"Well, we ain't fell off yet."

"No. But think o' what a convenience it would be if we could have some place to grab on to while de territory slid under our feet until de place we wanted to go to come along."

Invention Not Needed.

Lady—Why don't the railroads have mechanical appliances for loading and unloading trunks?

Depot Master—Well, you see, madam, lifting the trunks into the cars doesn't hurt anything but the men, and throwing them out doesn't hurt anything but the trunks.

Height of Ambition.

"Did you ever notice how diametrically an aviator's desire is opposed to that of a boss politician?"

"Can't say I have. In what way are they opposed?"

"An aviator is always willing and anxious to be discovered as the man higher up."

Labor Lost.

Physics Professor (after long winded proof)—And now, gentlemen, we get x equals o.

Sleepy Voice (from rear of room)—Gee, all that work for nothing.

Glad to Get Rid of Her.

"Did she get her divorce?"

"Oh, yes, but she was terribly disappointed in a way. You know he didn't contest it."

Indignant Farmer—Hey, boy, the fish in this creek belong to my family.

Smart Little Boy—I swan! This cat fish I just caught does look somethin' like you.

A Severe Test.

Stranger—Call your paper a great advertising medium, do you? It isn't worth shucks. I put in an advertisement last week, and didn't get an answer, not one.

Editor—My! my! How was your advertisement worded?

Stranger—"A poor young man wants a pretty wife who can do her own housework."

A Not Uncommon Fallacy.

"Why do you insist on investing your money away from your home town?"

"Well," replied Farmer Corntossel, "I've got a good deal of local pride, I have, and I regard the people in this here township as bein' so smart that nothe o' 'em is going to let any real bargains git away from him."

A Distinction.

"You say he is a man of artistic temperament?"

"Well, I shouldn't say that he has a strictly artistic temperament. He doesn't forget his obligations. He is simply unable to meet them."

Diversion at the Feast.

"That is a peculiarly fiery sauce you use. Are you fond of it?"

"No," replied Miss Cumrox; "but we always have it put on the table. It is so amusing to see people take an overdose of it and pretend they like it."

A Sure One.

"Reggy has a new attachment on his airship."

"What for?"

"For debt."

Motorist—Did the last cyclone do much damage to your farm?

Farmer—How kin I tell ye until I find the farm.

Ever Thus.

"Some of the wisest men do not attain wealth."

"I have noticed it," replied young Mrs. Torkins. "Somebody who doesn't know nearly as much about horses as Charley does always gets the money that he bets."

Misunderstood.

Sexton—And did the new curate speak, Parson—Oh, yes, he passed a few cursory remarks.

Sexton—Dear me, sir! How shocking!

Near Enough.

A Chicago banker was dictating a letter to his stenographer. "Tell Mr. Sonndeo," he ordered, "that I will meet him in Schenectady."

"How do you spell Schenectady?" asked the stenographer.

"Sc, S-c-e-r-e-r—— Tell him I'll meet him in Albany."

Regular Record-Breakers.

Miss Gotham—That talk about Philadelphia being so very, very slow is merely a newspaper joke, isn't it?

Visiting Minister—Certainly it is. You just ought to see a Philadelphia congregation leaving a church.

Mr. Gushington—I heard Senator Talksmith make a four hour speech without once referring to his notes.

Mr. Mocktimlid—That's nothing. I've been married twelve years and my wife hasn't had to use notes yet.

KICKED WISELY BUT TOO WELL.

Reggy—Sir, I—your daughter and I—er—are—going—to be married!

Her Dad—You are? Well, here is where you get kicked into the street!

Her Dad—Ah, this is bliss! See him go! Wow! That was one of my very best efforts!

The Daughter—How lovely! I came along just in time! We are off to be married! By by, Dad!

Men! Men! Men!

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Clorilla and Her Lovers

By Ellis Parker Butler

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CLORILLA MINCH was a most attractive girl in many ways, and quite a belle of Betzville, and she would have been married long ago if her father had had sense enough to keep still about Clorilla's feet, but as soon as Clorilla would get a lover well primed for the marriage ceremony old Minch would take him aside and explain about the Doosenbury feet. He said he had suffered all his life by the Doosenbury feet, and he wasn't going to have another human man step up against those feet unwarned. Clorilla's mother had been a Doosenbury, and Clorilla inherited the feet along that line.

Old Minch would say: "Now, for forty year I have had Maria's feet against the small of my back every night, and every night her feet were like ice, and if I hadn't been a martyr by nature, and meek and mild, never would I have stood it. And look at me now. My backbone is froze solid and I can't bend in the middle. Doc Weaver says it's no use trying to thaw it out, for Maria freezes it up again every night. And Clorilla has her ma's feet, only colder." Then he would call attention to Clorilla's feet, which were actually so cold that frost gathered on the outside of her shoes in the hottest August weather. In cool weather they were ten times colder. Generally this frightened the lover away, but not always.

Abraham Wangle was one it didn't frighten away, and Phillipus Googe was another, and it looked as if they would stick it out and have a tight race for Clorilla's hand. Abraham told old Minch that he guessed he could stand a small thing like a pair of cold feet so long as he had had fair notice, and he went to work immediately getting into training. Every night when he retired he took a fifty-pound cake of ice and strapped it to the small of back, thus hoping to gradually become acclimated to the temperature that Clorilla's feet would be. At first the ice gave him shivers, but in a month or two he had become so used to the coldness of it that he did not feel it at all, and he began complaining that the Betzville Ice Company's ice was poor ice. At the end of the third month he sent up North for his ice, so as to get a colder quality, and each month after that he would send further North for his ice. In a short time the small of his back became so used to cold ice that it suffered with the heat when it had no ice on it, and he had to go around all day with ice on his back. It melted and ran down into his shoes, and Abraham Wangle going along Main street sounded like a cow in a slushy lane.

But Phillipus Googe went about it another way. On Clorilla's birthday he gave her a fireless cooker. Phillipus hoped that if Clorilla cooked her feet in the fireless cooker every day she would gradually cook the cold out of them, for a fireless cooker needs no fire, but keeps on cooking anything that is put in it until it is taken out again. So every day Clorilla would cook up a bran mash and put in the cooker very hot, and put her feet in it. At first the mash had a habit of turning into a solid chunk of iced bran immediately upon coming in contact with her feet, and then her parents would have to chip off the icy mass with an ice pick, but gradually her feet began to warm up, and they grew warmer and warmer as the weeks went by, until Clorilla could not get the bran mash hot enough to feel comfortable. Even when it was boiling hot Clorilla complained that it felt chilly to her feet, and her feet became so permanently warm that when she put on her shoes they scorched the leather, and she had to have special shoes made, lined with asbestos.

By that time the very thought of cold against her feet made her tremble with fear, and she told Abraham Wangle that she could never marry a man with an icy back, and poor Abraham had to start in again, training his back to like heat. He gradually reduced the quantity and coldness of his ice pack, and then began wearing a small oil stove on the small of his back, and if a few months he could lie right down with his back on a hot stove and never know it. It was just then that Phillipus Googe forever deprived himself of all hopes of Clorilla by sending her a much larger fireless heater. Clorilla said this was an insult, and that she would never use a fireless cooker again, and to show her hatred of Phillipus she discontinued using the cooker and began resting her feet for hours at a time on a cake of ice. So Abraham Wangle had to start in once more icing his back.

Abraham iced his back and iced it, and then he began to be frightened, for it would not grow cold. It remained hot. He went to see Doc Weaver about it, and Doc told him plainly that the sudden change from hot to cold and back to hot again had taken the temper out of the small of his back, and had rendered it impervious to influences of temperature, and that it was like a fireless cooker now, and would remain hot as long as it remained at all. So Abraham spoke to Clorilla, and she did what was right and began to heat up her feet again. But when she tried it she found that her feet were like the small of Abraham's back and had lost their temper and would never become warm again. They were like a sealed cold storage vault and would remain cold as long as they were feet. At present it looks as if Clorilla and Abraham were to be forever separated, and Uncle Ashdod Clute says it is one of the most striking warnings against flirting he has ever seen, for if Clorilla had not tried to draw Phillipus on, she would, by this time, have had a good husband with an ice-cold back to place her ice-cold feet against. But old Minch scoffs at this. He says from what he knows of Doosenbury feet, no one with feet of that kind would ever marry a man she could not annoy with them. The majority of the Betzville voters agree with him.

Every day Clorilla would cook up a bran mash.

The "funny-hap" next week will be "Billie and His Feet." It's a brisk wheeze.

The Wedding Ring.

This is the mystery of the wedding-ring. Can you solve it? Nobody, as yet, has been able to account for its strange convolutions, but maybe you will be more clever.

What makes the wedding ring swing? Why does it swing one way for a man, and quite another way for a woman?

Is it the difference in what wise men call "aura?" And a well-known London doctor has recently demonstrated that the aura of the male and female differ widely.

Wedding rings often make the people who wear them, and even other persons, behave in the most unaccountable manner, but few of us have ever seen a wedding ring itself indulge in mysterious performances.

And this is not a trick. Remember that. It is a scientific experiment, illustrating the laws of physics, physiology or psychology.

This is the way to go about it:

Take a silver fork and place it before you on a polished wooden table. The fork should be at right angles from your body, with the handle nearest you.

Seat yourself at the table. Tie a piece of light string about fifteen inches in length to a plain gold wedding ring. After the wedding ring has been tied to the extereme end of the string wrap the other end of the string, three times around the first joint of the first finger on the right hand.

Hold the string in place around the first finger with the ball of the thumb of the same hand. Place your right elbow on the table beside the fork, with the forearm in a vertical position, and permit your hand to drop at a right angle from the wrist. This allows the string with the wedding ring attached to hang directly over the fork.

The ring must be suspended about one-quarter of an inch above the fork, and as nearly as possible at its center.

Place your left hand flat and palm downward upon the table beside the fork. Do your best to keep your hand steady, and thus prevent the string, with the attached wedding ring, from swinging. In spite of your efforts, you will find that the wedding ring moves.

If a man is holding the string the wedding ring will commence slowly to sway back and forth along the fork. If a woman holds the string, the ring sways across the fork. With some people the movement is slight, while with others it is marked, but at all times it is unmistakable.

Now here's the most curious part. If a woman is holding the string when the movement across the fork has once been firmly established, let a man place his right hand firmly upon her left hand which rests upon the table. The ring will be seen slowly to stop its cross movement, and after a few moments the motion will be reversed. The ring will swing the length of the fork.

A similar change of movement will occur in the case of a man holding the string while a woman places her right hand over his left hand.

Can you account for this mysterious behavior of the wedding ring?

Good Listeners.

Senator Swanson of Virginia tells a good story on himself about the first political speech he ever made. He says, "I jumped up and began, 'Gentlemen, Herodotus tells us——'

"'Which ticket's he on?' yelled the man with the red shirt.

"'Herodouts tells us,' I resumed with a gulp, 'of a whole army that was put to flight by the braying of an ass.' The crowd applauded and I felt fine. Then the man's voice rose above the din.

"'Young feller,' he called, 'you needn't be afraid for this crowd. It's been tested.'"

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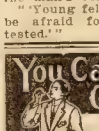

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8 Full Quart Bottles Ullman's Whiskey **$5.00**

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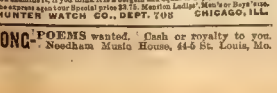

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The Serpent's Tongue

(Continued from page nine

in a sort of stupor. He finally rose, however, and started on toward the river, conscious of nothing save that he had done a horrible deed, and must end his life as soon as possible.

But while these things were taking place, other events were going rapidly forward. About midnight Budd McDowell was suddenly awakened by the jangling of his telephone bell. He immediately got up and took down the receiver, while Dixie asked sleepily what he was doing.

"Hello, is this Budd McDowell?" called a frightened voice from the other end of the line.

"Yes; what is wanted?"

"This is Sadie Hearn, at Gentryville. I've got something important to tell you."

"All right, Miss Sadie, what is it?"

"Professor Page is on his way out to your place to kill you. Look out for him."

"Professor Page?" repeated Budd, greatly puzzled.

"Yes; he come back today onexpected; an' folks is sayin' that you uster meet his wife on the sly arter they was married, so he's coming to kill you. He left here a few minutes ago."

"Who's been telling lies?" shouted McDowell, partly over the telephone and partly to his trembling wife, who was now up and lighting a lamp.

"I don't know, Budd," answered Sadie over the 'phone. "Hit's something about a note she writ you, an' your wife got holt——"

Budd rang off abruptly and wheeled upon his wife. "Dixie," he cried, sternly, "have you been meddling with any of my notes from Emily Willard? Now don't you lie—don't you dare lie to me!"

"I—I showed one to Sadie Hearn," admitted the wife, ready to fall upon her knees before her husband.

McDowell suddenly laid his two big hands upon her cringing shoulders as if he were going to shake her; but as suddenly, remembering the code of a gentleman, he desisted and asked: "Which note was it? What was in it?"

"It was the one where she told you to meet her at Carr's Spring," said the trembling wife.

"Why, there's nothing in that note to make Page want to kill me, unless he's gone crazy," said McDowell, greatly puzzled. Then he added slowly: "Dixie McDowell, you've been lying. You've been telling lies on the best and sweetest woman that ever lived. But you've got to fix it all up. Get on your things, while I hitch up to the buggy. We're going to start toward Gentryville, and if I don't have to kill Page on the way in self-defense, or maybe be killed myself, you've got to face him and tell him what a liar you are and clear everything up."

At the first mention of any danger to her husband, Dixie was all penitence. "Oh, let me go on and meet him alone!" she begged. "Oh, I don't want him to kill you! Oh, please don't go!"

Unmoved by these entreaties, McDowell persisted in his purpose, and five minutes later the two were driving madly over the moonlit road toward Gentryville. "You've tampered with that note some way, or put something in it to change its meaning," McDowell kept saying; but his sobbing wife persistently denied any such charge, and never ceased to beg her husband to turn back and avoid an encounter with Page. But they reached the village without meeting Page or any one else; and when they pulled up in front of the big, dark hotel everything was so silent and lifeless that McDowell could easily have believed that the telephone message was simply a joke, or that all that had passed for the last hour was a horrible dream. The hotel people had simply lost interest in a tragedy they could not witness, and returned to bed.

But before McDowell had time to "hello" a light sprung up in the landlady's room, and she and Sadie Hearn appeared shivering on the doorstep. The interview which followed was short and marked with a great deal of weeping on the part of Dixie and her ally and much stern language on the part of McDowell. Before it was over, McDowell had learned all that Sadie knew, which included the fact that the note she had given Mr. Page was dated June 4th, 1907, although he had had it in his possession since June 4th, 1901. His wife had maliciously made this change.

As the sudden realization of what she had done flashed upon him, he turned upon her as if to do her some bodily injury.

"So you did tamper with that note," he cried. "Well, how will you feel when one of us or both of us is laid out dead? How will you feel if we fish Page from the bottom of the river? You'll feel like a murderer I reckon; that's what you'll be, anyway." He suddenly turned to the landlady. "Mrs. Moore," he cried, "get up some men and send them out along all the roads leading out of town, especially them leading toward the river, and tell them if they find Page to tell him the truth. That note was written seven years ago. My wife and me is going on toward the cemetery and on past there toward the river. We may ketch up with him in time." And with that he struck his team and started up the street at a rapid rate.

"Be careful, Budd!" shouted Mrs. Moore after them, "he's got a pistol on him."

"You'll pay for this day's work," muttered McDowell, as they came in sight of the graveyard. They could see at once that there was no one in the graveyard; but the white chips about the mutilated monument attracted McDowell's attention, and he got down and walked across to it in the moonlight. As he looked and saw what Page had done, he groaned and put his hands ver his face to shut out the sight. A moment later he had returned to the carriage and snatched the lines. As he leaped to the seat, his wife saw a look on his face such as she had never seen before on the face of any human being.

"Did you find him? Is he dead?" she gasped

"Hush!" he cried, shuddering away from her. "Don't speak to me! Don't touch me! You are worse than a murderer—ten times worse!"

As he spoke, he lashed the horses into a run and held straight on toward the river. There were five terrible minutes, when it seemed that the buggy was going to be capsized at any intsant, and the he saw the figure of a man staggering from one side of the road to the other like a sleep walker, and knew that it was Page

"Don't, don't go on and give him a chance to kill you!" cried the terrified Dixie, putting out her hands toward her husband, who again shrank away from her. For only a moment McDowell thought of the danger he was running into, and then the nobler wish to save the desperate man who had been so deeply wronged prevailed, and he drove forward and pulled the team up short beside him.

"Mr. Page, that note was all a lie," he cried.

At first the other simply stared at him as if he were trying to remember who he was and why he was there. Then he said slowly, "I had intended to kill you, McDowell; but I guess I won't. I've got enough on my soul already."

"But the note is all a lie," repeated McDowell, too excited to know how to explain. "My wife here—my wife——"

"The note is in my wife's hand!" cried Page, suddenly wide awake and himself. "Don't try to lie to me, Budd McDowell, or I'll kill you in a minute." His hand was creeping slowly toward an opening in his hunting shirt, and McDowell knew that he must talk fast now or reach for his own weapon.

But Dixie, seeing the danger, came to her husband's rescue. "I changed the date on the note, Mr. Page," she cried.

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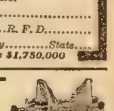

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Chicago Ledger

Entered as second-class matter June 25, 1885, at the postoffice at Chicago, Illinois, under act of March 3, 1879

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Advertising rate $2.25 per Agate Line, per insertion for advertisements in the The Chicago Ledger and The Saturday Blade combined. These two weeklies have an average circulation of

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COPIES WEEKLY.

GENTLE JABS.

Too often the club is in wrong hands.

Posing as a model citizen isn't an easy job.

It's easy to live on love—until you get hungry.

The moon affects the tide—likewise the untied.

Anyway, a toper never frowns when asked to smile.

Any man who repeats half he hears talks too much.

Consider the running expenses of a fast young man.

One system of winning at love is systematic flattery.

Uneasy lies the head that sports a home-made haircut.

In trying to carve his fortune many a man uses poor tools.

Being willing helps some, but it is getting busy that counts.

Many an honest dollar acquires a taint through association.

No doubt there are cheerful givers—but did you ever see one?

Every man may have his price, but the buyer is usually sold.

There may be just as good fish in the sea, but the sea is so large.

Matrimony transforms the poetry of life into an itemized expense account.

If you would win life's battle you must be a hard hitter and a poor quitter.

A suspicious man will always find what he's looking for if he looks long enough.

Many a man uses a crowbar for the purpose of prying into the affairs of others.

A self-made man is usually in such a hurry to finish the job that he neglects to add the finishing touches.

What kind of "dope" do the artists use who make pictures of plants and vegetables for the seed catalogues?

The modern girl is never satisfied until she gets a hat too large for her head and shoes too small for her feet.

When a man tries to explain his political belief to his wife she doesn't understand it any better than he does.

The average man doesn't care to have his face on bank notes. All he wants is an opportunity to get his hands on them.

A dash of coquetry in a pretty woman is as delicate as the tint of a tulip, but in a man it's as highly colored as a chromo.

(Continued from page thirteen.)

"It was written seven years ago, in 1901 long before Budd an' me or you an' her was married."

"But she spoke of me," cried Page, looking blankly at her.

"No, no," was the reply. "She called her old uncle 'the Professor,' an' she meant he had forbid her to let Budd come, because they was all tony folks, an' Budd was nothin' but common people like the rest of us; don't you understand?"

Before she had finished speaking, the truth of it all flashed upon Page, and he saw how foolish and wicked he had been, and sank down by the side of the road and wept as only a heartbroken man can weep. The two in the buggy sat looking at him for a moment, and then McDowell turned the team around and got out. "Go on back home," he said solemnly to his wife. "You can keep the team and the place. I'm going to send my mother to her brother's in Arkansas, and I'm going to leave the Ozarks forever. I never loved you, Dixie, not like a man ort, and if I had, maybe you'd 'a' been a better woman. It was Emily always; I couldn't never forget her, though I never onct hoped to marry her. Still, if they'd 'a' been any little folks in our home, maybe I'd 'a' loved you, after all—er—if you'd 'a' stayed at home more an' help me make a livin' an' fix up our little place. But hit's all over with now; I couldn't love you after what I've seed tonight."

The wife started to whimper and beg, but he stopped her in a flash. "No use to argue," he shouted. "The person that's a enemy to Emily Willard is a enemy to me. Now, go!"

When his wife was gone, the big, strong, true-hearted mountaineer sat down by his penitent and heartbroken friend in the light of the setting moon, and comforted him as if he had been a little child.

"There, there!" he murmured. "Don't take on so. We'll go an' take out that gravestone early in the morning before any one sees it, and order one twict as big and twict as fine from the company. Nobody's seen it but me, and I'll tell that they was a flaw in it and it cracked apart, and nobody'll ever know the difference. And listen, Mr. Page, I want to be your friend. I was always Emily's friend, and I want to be your'n. When you leave the Hills, I want to go with you."

And so it happened that as soon as a new monument had been set up to replace the one reputed to have cracked apart from a flaw, Budd McDowell and Harvey Page left the Hills together. In ancestry, education, culture, or ambition, they had little in common; but the same love and the same sorrow had sanctified their lives, and they would forever both turn their faces toward the same shrine, whenever the wild white violets were blooming in the Ozarks, or the moonlight was falling upon a lonely marble shaft.

* * *

Not Bought at Fire Sale.

Few boys, and not many men, are at ease in a perfectly new suit. They are always on their guard lest they be made the butt of jokes, but perhaps not all are as suspicious as was the youngster of whom a writer tells:

The principal of one of the East Side night schools was enrolling a new pupil, who was dressed in a suit of clothes so new that it hurt him. Just before the boy came in the principal heard the sound of fire engines in the street.

"What is your name?" the principal asked the lad.

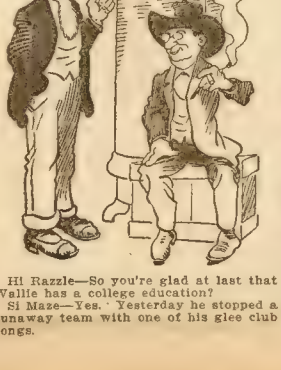
"Tom Dugan," was the reply.

"Where was the fire, Tommy?" asked the principal, as he wrote down the name. There was no reply; only a scowl.

"I say, where was the fire?" repeated the principal pleasantly.

"Don't git gay with me," was the somewhat astonishing answer. "Dere wasn't no fire, see? I bought dis suit and paid seventy-five cents for it."

* * *



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SALESMEN making small towns, just what you want for pocket sideline. Something new, snappy and catchy. Quick shipments, prompt commissions. State territory covered. Write for order book today. Burd Mfg. Co., 212 Sigel St., Chicago.

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WANTED—Reliable man in each locality who is interested in lodge work, either as president, secretary, deputy or member. If you know something about lodge work, how it is started, carried on, etc., and would like to turn that knowledge into some good money during your spare moments, write immediately to Box G-409, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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WANTED—Active man in each locality. To join this Society. And introduce our Memberships. Sick, accident, death benefits. All or spare time. Make $50 to $500 a month. Write. Box N. L.-283, Covington, Ky.

GOVERNMENT Post Office Examinations everywhere soon. Get prepared by former U. S. Civil Service Examiner. Write for booklet B, Patterson Civil Service School, Rochester, N. Y.

WANTED. Post Office Clerks, City and Rural Carriers. Thousands needed. Examinations soon. Trial Examination Free. Write Today. Ozment, K. St. Louis

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Miss Amanda Jones, who possesses the artistic temperament in a very high degree, is as careless as a lily of the field as to her attire. Not long ago, being away from home and far from the watchful eyes of her family, she selected and purchased an evening gown for herself, and wore it on several occasions with great comfort and satisfaction. Shortly after her return to her home she was invited to a reception, and decided that it would be a good opportunity to wear her self-selected gown. Accordingly, she put it on and presented herself complacently for family inspection.

"What is the matter with your dress?" asked her sister, eyeing her critically. "It hikes up in the most singular way in the back and seems to be too long in the front."

"I've always thought it looked very nice," said Miss Jones with an air of chagrin.

"But it doesn't fit!" exclaimed the sister, still examining the garment attentively. "Is that the way you've always worn it?" was the next question, uttered in a despairing tone.

"Yes, of course. How else could I wear it?" was the response. "And it is so comfortable, with plenty of room in the back for my shoulder blades. And then I like a gown to fasten in front. Why, what's the matter?" as her sister covered her face with her hands and sat down abruptly. "Do you see anything wrong with it?"

"No, no, no," said her sister, shaking her head, "only, you know, you've been wearing it hind part before."

* * *

J. P.

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ANECDOTES OF PEOPLE

Like the Spratts.

"England and Germany, spending all their cash on armaments, remind one of Mr. and Mrs. Spratt."

The speaker was Mayor Esterbrooke of Pawtucket. He continued, with a smile:

"England and Germany will arm themselves to the point of bankruptcy, to the point of impotence. It will be a case of Mr. and Mrs. Spratt all over again.

"Mr. Spratt, you know, once told his friends that he would attend a certain 'smoker,' and Mrs. Spratt told hers very firmly that he wouldn't. Well, a non-partisan acquaintance, the evening of the smoker in question, dropped in at the Spratts' to see who had won out.

"The visitor found Spratt and his wife fast asleep in their chairs at the dining-room table. Spratt, you see, had put a sleeping powder in Mrs. Spratt's coffee, so that he might slip away, and she had put a sleeping powder in his to prevent him from doing so."

A Kick.

"What's the matter, Hiram?"

"I thought the Agricultural Department was run in the interests of the American farmer."

"Well, ain't it?"

"I wrote 'em for some literature to help me get summer boarders, but they had nothing of the kind in stock."

Circulation of Oratory.

On one occasion Senator Tillman was so much pleased with a speech he made that he had it printed in pamphlet form.

"I congratulate you," Senator Bailey told him a few days later, "on that speech which you have circulated as a pamphlet. I happened to see one this morning, and it contained some of the best things I have ever seen in any pamphlet on that subject."

"I am very proud to hear you say so," said Tillman, much gratified. "What were the things that pleased you so much?"

"Why," explained Bailey, "as I passed the Senate restaurant this morning I saw a girl come into the corridor with two cherry pies wrapped up in it."

Butting In.

The presence of a distinguished jurist at a banquet board recently prompted State Senator Samuel A. Ettelson to tell the following story:

"The speaker said that the presence of the learned judge reminded him of an incident that occurred recently in the county building.

"Two lawyers were engaged in a heated discussion and the debate became so acrimonious that the lawyers indulged in personalities. One lawyer said, speaking to the other, 'Sir, you are an unmitigated liar.' The other lawyer retorted, 'Sir, you are an infernal scoundrel!'

"The judge, who was a model of politeness and decorum, leaned over the bench and said: 'Gentlemen, kindly address your remarks to the court.'"

Her High Aim.

Dr. Lyman Abbott, who is an opponent of votes for women, was praising, on a Bermuda steamer, a young Vassar girl.

"She delighted me," he said, "in a chat I had with her at tea. We talked about Ibsen and Shaw, we talked about the new morality and the militant suffragette, and finally I said quizzically:

"'And what, may I ask, is the height of your ambition?'

"'Six foot two,' she answered promptly, 'and he's the best first base Yalevard's had for seventeen years.'"

Sister to the Rescue.

Walter was eight years old. He had been very naughty. In point of fact, he had emptied a bottle of red ink over his mother's white Pomeranian—just for fun, of course!

Now, the price had to be paid for the enjoyment, and father was taking a hand in the game.

Little Lucy, Walter's sister, was in the room at the time of the conflict. Thud, thud, thud! fell father's hand, punctuated by Walter's wailings.

At last Lucy could stand it no longer. Bursting with indignation, she stamped her tiny foot on the floor.

"Tread on his corn, Wal!" she cried. "That'll stop him."

Fervent Pleading.

They sat in the hotel corridor.

"Gimme just one," he pleaded.

She shook her head.

Presently he emerged into the lobby.

"That fellow was pleading pretty hard for a kiss," remarked a lounger who had overheard the conversation. "Is that an engaged couple?"

"That couple?" said another lounger. "They're married. It was a dollar he was pleading for; not a kiss."

Warmth.

"Did that investigation develop anything in the nature of the third degree?"

"It went away beyond that. When I left it was in the neighborhood of a hundred in the shade."

Not for Ten Times as Much.

Marks—So you saw the woman who dropped the purse, but lost her in the crowd. Did you advertise for her?

Parks—Yes; I put this in: "If the very homely woman of forty, wearing a dress of last year's style and a most unbecoming hat, who lost her purse containing $3.50 on Boylston street, Saturday, will apply to ——, her property will be returned."

I've received no answer, as yet, though.

Marks—Good Lord! Do you think a woman would own up to that description for $3.50?

Another Swindle.

Farmer Hayseed—No I don't want any more labor-savin' machines. I've tried enough of 'em. Look in there. Thar's a typewritin' machine my wife spent all her egg money to git for me, 'cause I ain't very handy with the pen. Just look at the 'tarnal swindle.

Agent—What's the matter with it?

Farmer Hayseed—Matter? Why, you can't even write yr name with the 'tarnal thing unless you know how to play a church organ

Barnum's Ruse.

P. T. Barnum's tent manager came to him one day and complained that he could not move the crowds from the big tent after the show.

Barnum considered a moment.

"Get Sam to stand near the door and yell out. 'This way to the egress!'" he advised with twinkling eyes.

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References:—Mercantile Agencies or State Bank of Chicago

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The Rival Submarines;

Or, Close Play for a Million

By Weldon J. Cobb

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CHAPTER I.

THE BOY CHAUFFEUR.

"FASTER!"

"It can't be done."

"Why not?"

"We're running the limit now."

"Five hundred dollars if you reach that turn ahead of us within the next ten minutes."

"No use."

"A thousand!"

"It's a big lot of money, but I'd make it if I could without reward because it is my duty. As it is, I might try, but it may mean——"

"Well, what?"

"A smash-up—destruction!"

It was a vivid scene of action and suspense on a lonely country road, with the twinkling lights of a little railroad town in the distance. A magnificent red touring car, strong as a giant, swift as an eagle, was tearing along the smooth turnpike at a frightfully dangerous rate of speed.

In the front seat was a boy who suggested the real, live, up-to-date lad of the twentieth century. He wore a jaunty cap and a close-fitting sweater. His pose showed the ideal young chauffeur. His eyes were sparkling with vim and go, his face bright as a dollar. Every move of his deft well-shaped hand showed that he knew the machine he handled down to its most intricate mechanism.

In the seat behind him, leaning forward in an attitude of intense excitement, was a handsome, keen-eyed man apparently about thirty years of age. Neatness and quickness of action seemed natural to him. The machine was whirring and whizzing till its fast-revolving wheels were a dazzling blur of spokes and hubs. The great body of the auto swayed like a rocking boat at sea. A jolt would come that would lift the man two feet from the cushions, and away the ponderous machine from side to side like a pliant piece of whipcord. He had to lean far over from the tonneau to make the driver hear him.

"Listen," he spoke rapidly, and in a tone which showed that he was used to direct and control, "I much reach the railroad depot at that town ahead of us within nine minutes, or miss an opportunity involving millions of dollars and possibly many precious human lives."

"You thrill me, sir," came in swift jerks from the lips of the boy, every muscle bent to his task, and he gave the machine a daring, swifter spurt.

"Can you do it?" urged his passenger, breathlessly.

"I doubt it. Yes, though—there is one forlorn chance."

"What is it?"

"A short cut over the field yonder."

"Yes! yes!" pressed his eager fare.

"It's a rough slide."

"Never mind that."

"But if we can make it we can gain four minutes."

"Try!"

The speaker's voice was hard and dry, his every nerve was tense, yet straining. Some tremendous outcome seemed to depend on his treasuring up the seconds of time as though they were precious drops of gold. In one hand he held his watch. His eyes had but two movements—one toward the costly quarter-second chronometer, and the other ahead at the landscape, hazy though mellow with the soft radiance of a crescent moon.

"Brr-rr!" gasped the man, as the auto made a dive rather than a glide down the side of the turnpike, over a ditch, and bounced in among a half-plowed field choked up with clumps of earth and stubble.

Some kind of a farm wagon had crossed the field more than once, making a sort of rutty path. To this the boy chauffeur held his machine as best he might. It was a wobbly, pounding progress, but he managed wheel, lever, and brakes superbly. The passenger breathed hard but hopefully, for every yard accomplished on that diagonal course meant a sure short-cut gain. Suddenly he stared ahead, straining his glance amid the dry meadow mist, and cried sharply: "Look out!"

"Thunder!" ejaculated the young chauffeur, "we're in for it!"

What presented was a drainage ditch about fifteen feet wide. For this the machine was directly headed. What startled the passenger of the auto, and now fairly thrilled its chauffeur, was the fact that a temporary bridge that had once spanned the gap was now out of commission. Two stringers were set from bank to bank, but the center planks were gone.

"Turn!" shouted the passenger.

The young chauffeur saw no way out of the field. If he veered, it was to come to a halt and precious time lost. His marvelously quick eye saw the risks and counted the chances.

"Hold on firmly!" he shouted breathlessly.

Then, to the amazement of his passenger, he urged the machine straight ahead in a wild, reckless dash, out-speeding all former efforts.

The auto seemed to fly. It did fly, in fact, aimed straight at the ditch. A bound, a leap, and like a trained hunter the chauffeur steered it as it shot through the air, and landed on the opposite bank.

"Marvelous!" gasped the electrified passenger.

Tang—crack!

The auto had passed the Rubicon in safety, but something broke. Like a crack runner taken with a sudden sprain, it continued to limp, but only to limp. Some rod or cog had snapped. They had reached a broad, hard roadway now, near to the railway tracks, but the machine could be forced only to a slow run.

"We can't make it," said the chauffeur, in a tone of chagrin.

"Too late, anyway," answered his passenger, with a deep sigh of disappointment.

The speaker stood erect in the auto, his ear bent, his eyes fixed down the railroad tracks.

"Yes," he added, snapping the watch shut, "that is the 8:31 train. My man is aboard and started."

"Aboard that train, do you mean?" inquired the chauffeur.

"Yes."

"You mean he is the man who has made you all this haste and trouble?"

"Exactly!"

"If you can reach him, even on that train, your mission will be accomplished?"

"Precisely."

"And if I can stop the train?"

"If you can—what?" ejaculated the passenger, in profound surprise.

"Just what I say," affirmed the chauffeur, calmly, but with forceful confidence. "If I can stop the train before reaching the crossing here, you can do the rest?"

"It would solve the problem—decidedly yes."

"I will stop the train," declared the boy chauffeur, positively. "Do just as I say."

The headlight of the approaching locomotive showed about a mile away. The train was just pulling out of the station. The two in the auto could hear its bell ringing, the swish, swish of the steam, the short, quick whistling for clear switches.

With a nimble leap the chauffeur was over the side of the auto. Quickly he detached one of the rear red lamps of the machine.

"Take this," he directed. "Run down the tracks, and set it between the rails. I will attend to this end."

The passenger, as has been said, was a person of prompt and resolute action. He ran down the track at once. Following him a short distance with the other red lantern, the young automobilist placed this about fifty feet from the crossing.

Then, springing into the machine, he drove it directly across the railroad crossing, and halted it there, squarely in the way of the approaching locomotive. In another moment he was out of the auto again, and stood peering with piercing, attentive eyes down the tracks.

He saw the swaying, glowing headlight of the advancing engine come nearer and nearer. Then, apparently not one hundred feet from the red lantern which his passenger had set in the middle of the roadbed, there was a sharp signal. Toot! toot!

The train slowed down, stopped, then two trainmen bearing lanterns came hurrying forward to the second automobile lantern. Immediately the boy chauffeur grasped a wrench from the tool box of the machine. As the two men came up he was seemingly busy at work repairing it.

"Here," called out one of the trainmen, "what are you up to?"

"Don't you see?" placidly queried the chauffeur.

"Nice fix, this—stopping a train!"

"Sorry."

"Stuck on the track, eh?"

"Looks so."

"How long will it take you to fix the machine?"

"Oh, only a few minutes."

As he spoke, while tinkering away at nothing, the young chauffeur kept his eyes sharply fixed down the rails. As he saw two figures approach, and recognized one of them as his passenger, he smiled with quiet satisfaction.

"It's all right, I fancy," he said to himself.

He crawled out from under the machine. He noticed that the companion

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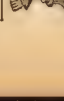

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of his passenger was an august man of advanced age, straight as an arrow, and possessing a face of peculiar character.

"All right," spoke his passenger, in an undertone.

"Good," nodded the boy chauffeur.

He sprang into the machine, backed it from the track, and waited for the two men to seat themselves in the tonneau. His passenger, with marked courtesy and respect, assisted his companion into the auto. Then he stepped up to the young chauffeur. His eyes were glowing with appreciation and kindness.

"Young man," he said, seizing the hand of the young man and shaking it fervently, "what is your name?"

"Bert Noble," came the prompt reply.

"My friend," said the passenger, in an intense tone, "it is a name I shall never forget!"

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY DETECTIVE.

Bert Noble thrilled with satisfaction as he started up the automobile. He hoped he had done a big thing. He was sure that his passenger greatly appreciated his efforts.

"The machine can go only very slowly," he said.

"Very well," answered his passenger. "Drive to the hotel of the town."

Then, turning to his companion, he added, "You can give me an hour's time, Professor Edison?"

"Two hours, if necessary, sir," replied the other. "I shall now have to wait for the midnight train. I may possibly get to the city in time to catch the steamer Urania, but I doubt it. You understood, sir, that I cabled the Czar of Russia that I would be in St. Petersburg at a certain hour on a certain day. This delay may cancel the appointment."

"I am very sorry," said Bert's passenger.

"Do not speak of it. The credentials you brought me from the man who has been my best friend and patron, the Secretary of the Navy of the United States, are sufficient to make me forego my own personal interests in his behalf."

"The mischief!" spoke Bert to himself. "The Czar of Russia! the Secretary of the Navy! This Professor Edison must be a very important personage."

Nothing further of the conversation of the two men reached Bert's hearing until they came to quite a pretentious hotel in the town near by.

"Now, then, Noble," spoke his passenger, "you have had a severe experience for me. I want you to give orders to have your machine repaired and held here in readiness for me. Then come up to the rooms I shall engage in the hotel."

"Very well," bowed Bert.

Thus it was that, ten minutes later, after following out these directions, Bert was shown to the second floor of the hotel. His passenger had engaged two rooms. One was a sitting-room. In its anteroom were a table and some chairs. In the larger room the two men were seated. Bert's passenger came out to him.

"Noble," he said, "I want you to order a good meal, and remain subject to my further movements, if you will."

The speaker touched the call bell and left Bert to his own devices. The latter was hungry after his sharp drive, and he ordered an appetizing meal. Then he sat back in a luxurious armchair, content to rest idly after what had, indeed, been a strenuous dash.

Suddenly Bert was aroused from his day dreams. There was a transom over the door connecting the two rooms, and this was open. Indifferent to the fact, or not conscious that their words floated clearly through the aperture, the two men in the larger apartment were conversing freely.

Bert had no intention of acting the eavesdropper. However, he had became so interested in the first words that fell upon his ear, that unwittingly he was led into listening to every word spoken.

"And now sir," spoke Professor Edison, "as to the motive of your strange mission to me?"

"Very well," came the speedy response, "I will be brief and to the point. There is my card."

"Ah! 'Robert Archer, United States Secret Service.'"

"Eh!" breathed Bert, with a great start. "Why, I've heard of him. I've read of him—Robert Archer, known as the Boy Detective! So, he is my mysterious passenger, disguised."

The Boy Detective! Bert Noble recalled in a flash some of the marvelous captures and discoveries in the line of great criminals that Bob Archer had made. The son of "Old Marvel," himself a noted hunter of men, he had made a bewildering detective record within a brief space of time, and the news journals of two continents had been filled with thrilling details of his noted exploits.

"I have heard of you," the Professor said.

"I come to you," answered young Archer, "as the representative of Chief Wilkie of the Secret Service of the United States. There is my written authority to act in their behalf."

A paper rustled. A second was evidently handled.

"This second document," spoke Bob Archer, "as you see, is from the International Board of Marine Underwriters."

"And this all signifies——"

"I will explain. You are Professor Edison, the great submarine expert. You are today sought for by the great government powers of the world to devise and construct submarine vessels for the uses of warfare. You are the man who built the first perfect under-water boat—the Ravager."

"Yes, that is true."

"What became of that craft?"

"After being exhibited and experimented with, it was stolen from me."

"By whom?"

"I never knew. It was my belief that some crank or enthusiast secretly took possession of the Ravager, tried to run it, and sank with it. That was five years ago. To this day there has been no trace of its fate."

"Mistake," pronounced Bob Archer, in an incisive tone.

"What do you mean?"

"The Ravager was stolen, it is true, but not sunk."

"Ah, you amaze me!"

"Did you ever hear of Red Rodridgo?"

"No."

"He was a Bolivian anarchist, revolutionist, brigand, and pirate. A price was set on his head, and on a lonely island in the South Atlantic Ocean he surrounded himself with a few choice desperadoes like himself. They had secret emissaries in every land, and set themselves up to do any wholesale piratical crime for money. They devised a plot to secure a submarine boat. They stole yours."

"This is, indeed, news to me," murmured Professor Edison.

"That was five years ago. Since that time a large number of mysterious occurrences have puzzled and defied the skill of detectives the world over. A bomb was exploded one night in an insurgent Peruvian fleet. It changed the fortunes of war. It was never learned where it came from until we ascertained that it was the Ravager that stole into that land-locked, sentry-guarded harbor, under water, and did the deed."

"The Ravager!" fairly gasped Bert Noble, thrilled to the soul. "What's this! The Ravager! Why, this is remarkable!"

The boy chauffeur sprang to his feet, quivering in every limb. His face had grown deathly white. His eyes had become suddenly fixed on space, as though in fancy or memory he saw some vivid picture of terror, invoked by the mention of that fearsome name which left his lips in an affrighted gasp: "The Ravager!"

The servant came in noiselessly with the meal for the young chauffeur, arranged it on the table and retired. Bert Noble had resumed his seat. Every nerve was still strained to hear the rest of that impressive interview going on in the adjoining apartment.

"Last year," went on Bob Archer, "several persons utterly disappeared from the face of the earth. Some were wealthy heirs, some governmental conspirators, some troublesome aspirants to royalty. As far as we can trace these mysterious happenings, the secret agency of Red Rodridgo, now captain of the Ravager, was employed in those tasks."

"Why, this is positively alarming!" gasped Professor Edison.

"Within the past two years," proceeded the young detective, "over twelve merchantmen have disappeared at sea, or have been sunk mysteriously while at some remote foreign anchorage. In every instance the craft was old and unseaworthy, in every instance, as well, the ship and cargo were over insured to the last surplus limit. It is for the insurance companies that I am now acting. They have supplied me with unlimited funds. They have authorized me to explore the oceans of the world to attempt to run down this ruthless submarine pirate, Rodridgo, and capture or destroy the Ravager."

"How?" came the quick, sharp challenge.

"By purchasing and putting into instant active service your latest submarine model."

"The Destroyer?"

"Yes."

There was an impressive silence in the next room for the space of fully two minutes. Then Professor Edison spoke.

"You wish to purchase the Destroyer?"

"I must."

"Under no circumstances would I consider a proposition to buy the boat except the present. The Secretary of the Navy sent you to me. He is my lifelong friend. You desire to rid the world of a band of infamous desperadoes."

"And the price?"

"I was offered $300,000 for the Destroyer by the Brazilian Government. I refused it. Russia wants the same type. I had about decided to retain possession of the craft as a model."

Again the quick rustling of paper fell on the ear of the intently listening young chauffeur.

"Professor Edison," spoke Bob Archer, "there is a check on the National City Bank of New York City, the largest financial institution in America. You will notice that it is stamped as certified up to $1,000,000. Fill in the amount you think right, and it will be honored on presentation."

"You shall have the Destroyer for $300,000, its cost," spoke the old inventor, and there was the scratching of a fountain pen. "Now, then, added Professor Edison, "if you will come with me to the office of a lawyer, I will make a legal transfer to you of the Destroyer."

"Where is the boat?"

"Ten miles down the shore in charge of a custodian. How do you propose to man the Destroyer?"

"I have already cabled for Laverne, of Paris."

"Ah, a fortunate choice. He is an expert in his line."

The two men came out into the next room. The young detective placed a friendly hand on the shoulder of the young chauffeur.

"Resting?" he asked, pleasantly. "That is good, you need it. I wish you would

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see that the automobile is ready in an hour, when I return. There is a further ten miles spin down the beach."

Bert Noble bowed silently. The two men left the hotel. The boy chauffeur arose to his feet, eyes serious, face working with varied emotions.

"The Ravager! The Destroyer!" he said, in a quick, intense whisper. "Oh, this is fate!"

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING DECLARATION.

One hour later, when Bob Archer returned to the hotel, he found the boy chauffeur where he had left him. The young detective had closed his arrangements with Professor Edison, and was now ready for new immediate-action work.

"Well, my friend," inquired Bob, in a cheery, friendly manner, "can you help me along further on my way?"

"Surely, if you wish it."

"I do wish it," replied Bob, seating himself opposite to Bert. "It will be a long time before I forget all you have done for me tonight."

"It was my duty to do all I could for a passenger," replied Bert.

"See here, my friend," spoke the boy detective, familiarly, "what is the trouble?"

"How do you mean?"

"You look pale and peaked. I see you have not touched your meal. Sick?"

"Oh, no," replied Bert, striving to brace up. "That drink of ours against time was a trifle rough on the nerves, you see."

"I appreciate that. Now, then, I wish to go about ten miles down the beach. In fact, I shall have to leave you there. I am going to inspect a submarine vessel, and it may consume some time. I think, therefore, we had better settle for your services here."

Bob Archer took out a large wallet well filled with bank notes. He selected a fifty dollar bill, and one of a hundred dollar denomination.

"I wish you to accept this hundred dollars personally," said Bob. "I want your address, and, further along the line, I wish to meet you again."

Bert took the money, but he said:

"This is far overpaying my services. Tell you, I will charge you nothing and gladly return the money, if you will allow me one privilege."

"And what is that?"

"Let me go with you and see that submarine boat."

"Hey?" exclaimed Bob, in some surprise, "You are interested in submarines?"

"Very greatly."

"Well, you are welcome to both the money and a view of the celebrated Destroyer."

"Thank you."

"Is your machine repaired?"

"Yes, and all ready for service."

Bob Archer eyed his chauffeur keenly. He was too shrewd and experienced to fail to note some unusual agitation on the part of Bert. However, he paid no attention to this feature of the case for the time being.

They went down to the street, and soon the auto was free of the town and speeding the smooth beach road. The young detective was absorbed in plans concerning his sensational purchase of the Destroyer. The boy chauffeur was in a strange, indefinite mood of flustering suspense.

A bright electric light finally came into view, like a brilliant star, at a point where a little divided tongue of land ran out into the sea. It shone from just without an inclosure guarded by a high board fence. At a word from Bob, the young chauffeur ran the auto near to the gate and halted it.

"Come with me," spoke Bob, with a quizzical, friendly smile. "We will later go into an investigation of this strange fascination of yours for the Destroyer."

Bert said nothing. His busy brain was burning with vivid thoughts, the tenor and importance of which would have amazed Bob Archer, expert detective and analyst that he was, had he but dreamed of their close connection with his present enterprise.

A rope hung from a gong above the gateway. Young Archer pulled this at once. A wicket in the gate swung open. A keen, ferret-eyed old man presented his face at the aperture.

"What do you want?" he challenged.

"I come from Professor Edison."

"Oh, you do?"

"Yes."

"Prove it."

"There you are."

Bob Archer passed in a folded sheet. The lone sentinel scanned it critically. Then he touched an inside bar and the ponderous portal swung inward.

"I am glad to see you, sir," spoke the old man, courteously. "Sorry to think that the Destroyer is sold, though."

"I understand the boat is in shipshape order," said Bob.

"Ready for action at an hour's notice, sir. There she is."

As the man spoke, he touched an electric button sunk in the gate frame. Immediately a dazzling glow spread all over the inclosure. Its brilliancy and completeness bewildered both the visitors. As to Bert Noble, he gave a startled cry of astonishment, mingled with delight. Then, like a statue, engrossed, entranced, he stood viewing the bright picture before them.

In the water was the Destroyer.

It was a spectacle unique and marvelous, that upon which they gazed. The divided tongue of land was built up with forges, workshops and tool houses. In the deep water between, set on sectional stocks that were easily removable, was the Destroyer.

The boy detective took in the view with a practical all-absorbing eye for details. Bert Noble stood as one in a dream. It was the differing point of view of the novice and the expert, for to the young chauffeur the survey meant a hidden past, a hopeful future, of which the submarine was a basis.

"You wish to look over the boat, sir?" asked the old custodian.

"Yes," replied Bob.

"Go up the ladder yonder to the turret," directed the old man. "I will light up. You will have to make your way about alone. I am too rheumatic to act as a guide."

"I will pilot the way, if I may, spoke up Bert.

"You!" exclaimed Bob, with a penetrating glance at his companion. "Then you know something about submarines?"

"A little," replied Bert, simply.

The Destroyer lay on a slant, submerged all except the lookout. This was a small structure that might hold half a dozen persons, and came up about six feet out of the water. It was operated by a lever from inside the boat, and folded up and fell to one side under water when requisite. Under this was the prism outlook, which came up two feet from the surface of the water, and

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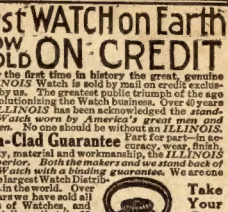

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on the sea would not be noticeable one hundred feet distant.

The hull of the Destroyer was cigar-shaped, and its outer surface was covered with steel-riveted plates. Its length was over one hundred and twenty feet. As the two visitors reached the conning tower, the old man turned the current onto the wires that illuminated the ship.

Descending past the manhole, the visitors found themselves in a room where a great clear mirror stood. This answered to the finder in a camera. The prism reflected everything around it, and a man seated in the room under the water could trace surroundings from a distance through the reflections cast upon the mirror.

Below this room was a level floor, extending the entire length of the boat. Below this again were hatchways and small compartments for storage. Here, too, were the cabins. Still lower down in the hull were the water tanks. These were provided with valves, which, opened, admitted great volumes of water, sufficient to sink the ship to any underwater level desired.

There were air compressors to expel the water when it was desired again to bring the craft to the surface, strong-walled receivers for the air necessary for easy breathing—in fact, all the apparatus to run by gasoline when the conning tower was above the sea level, and to operate with the storage electric power under the surface.

From section to section of the craft, to the intense amazement of the young detective, Bert Noble led the way, explaining everything. His knowledge of the equipment and mechanism of the boat was remarkable. More than once the shrewd boy detective regarded him keenly, almost suspiciously. He could not account for the great knowledge the young chauffeur possessed of submarines.

For over an hour they went over every part of the splendid piece of mechanism representing the latest and most complete model of its kind in the world. When they came to the outer air again the old warder accompanied them to the gate.

"I shall be here again with some friends in the morning," observed Bob.

"Very well, sir."

"In the meantime, spare no money or vigilance in keeping meddling outsiders from entering the ship or tampering with it."

"Don't fret about that, sir," replied the old man. "I have an assistant on guard, and both of us are armed heavily. We've had some suspicious visitors, but I have so far managed to keep them at a distance."

"Continue to do so."

"Trust me, sir."

The visitors left the inclosure in silence. Both were thinking deeply. Bert got into his seat. To his surprise his passenger mounted beside him.

"Where to?" asked the young chauffeur.

"Run about fifty feet down the beach," was the direction. "I wish to have a talk with you."

"All right," nodded Bob briskly. "What is it, may I ask?" he inquired, as he brought the machine to a halt out of the possible range of eavesdroppers.

The boy detective faced his chauffeur squarely. The latter met his glance without quailing, though Bert was pale with the tension of suppressed excitement.

"I wish to ask," spoke Bob, "how you come to know so much about submarines?"

"I can answer that in less than a dozen words," answered Bert, promptly.

"Do so."

The reply caused the young detective to start with a vivid thrill, as Bert said:

"I was cabin boy on the stolen submarine, the Ravager!"

This story, developing very thrilling happenings, will be continued in the Ledger issue of next week. If you are not a subscriber to the Ledger we would like to have your name on our list. The Ledger is only $1.00 per year; it is worth many times that amount. Send in your subscription, for many great stories that you cannot afford to miss will appear during the coming months.

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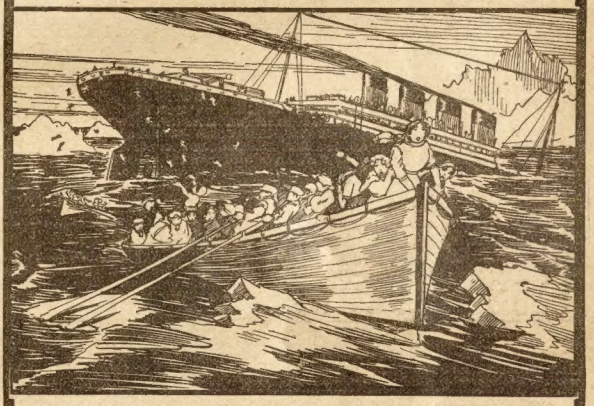

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A group of Hours one even,
Met, as they took their upward flight,
Into the highest heaven.

And they were going up to Heaven,
With all that had been done
By little children, good or bad,
Since the last rising sun.

And some had gold and purple wings;
Some drooped like faded flowers,
And sadly soared to tell the tale
That they were misspent Hours.

Some glowed with rosy hopes and smiles
And some had many a tear;
Others had some kind words and acts
To carry upward there.

A shining Hour, with golden plumes,
Was laden with a deed
Of generous sacrifice a child
Had done for one in need.

And one was bearing up a prayer
A little child had said,
All full of penitence and love,
While kneeling by his bed.

And thus they glided on, and gave
Their records, dark or bright,
To Him who marks each passing hour
Of childhood's day or night.

Remember, children of the earth,
Each Hour is on its way,
Bearing its own report to Heaven
Of all you do and say.

The Boy and the Ball.

You do not often hear of small girls that fall out of trees or get hurt through carelessness or because they are trying to do something that nobody else is foolish enough to do. Either the girls are all good little girls and don't climb trees, or they do climb trees and get into other kinds of mischief, but don't let any one else know of what they are doing.

That was not the case with Carl Morrison, but Carl is a boy, and so it doesn't make any difference. Carl lives in a suburb of St. Louis, and he is such a queer and unusual boy that he plays ball. Well, Carl was playing this strange game and he played it butter-fingers fashion. The way to play butter-fingers fashion is to hold your hands wide open so that you can't miss catching the ball. You do miss it, though, and after a while you learn how to catch properly.

Well, as we were saying, Carl played butter-fingers, and he did not catch the ball. It went through his hands and rolled along the street and down the gutter. There was the grating of a drain in the gutter, and the ball went through the grating. Carl did not care to lose the ball, because if you try to play ball without any ball you will find it a difficult task and be reduced to throwing bean bags, which is not a manly sport. Carl is nothing if not manly, and so he pulled off the grating, but he looked first to see that there was no policeman within sight. Policemen are always spoiling a fellow's fun.

There was no one in sight except the two boys he had been playing with, and so he ducked down into the drain. It was not a large drain, but it was large enough for Carl, and he crawled along it looking for his ball. He did not look, exactly, because it was perfectly dark and he could not see anything, but he did a lot of feeling. He crawled along down the slope that the water runs over when there is a rain, and at last he found the ball. It was about time, he thought, because he had crawled so far that his knees were beginning to feel it. He started to go back, but he couldn't. The drain was so small that when he tried to back up his clothing caught on the side. It was so small that he couldn't turn around. Carl wished that he had let the ball go.

But just as he was wishing that he caught a glimpse of a light ahead of him. He was rather afraid to go on, since there is a hole in the bottom of every drain going down to the sewer, but he thought he might just as well take the chance as stay under the street for the rest of his days and nights, and so on he crawled. He had made a good choice. It was not long before the light grew stronger and then Carl found that he had reached another grating that opened from the street above. It did not take him long to crawl out into the upper daylight and run back to where the boys were standing by the other entrance to the drain. The boys were more frightened than Carl had been in the middle of the tunnel. He had been gone twenty minutes, and they thought that he was dead. He wasn't though—only dirty.

Riding Goats.

Goats are bad-tempered and supercilious, most of them. They can learn things if they like, but usually they do not like. They made trouble in Philadelphia because they were so pig-headed.

A stable had caught fire, and the fire department had been called to put out the blaze. The firemen drew the hose down to the stable, and were getting along all right when the man that lived next door became anxious. He had a stable, too, and he was afraid that it would catch fire and burn up the goats inside, and so he opened the door and let the goats out. That is just where he made a mistake. The goats were frightened and nervous, and when a goat is frightened and nervous in addition to being bad-tempered and supercilious he is not a pleasant companion to have without a fence between you and him; moreover, there were several goats that came out of the stable all at once.

You know how goats fight. If you do not know, just go ask one of the Philadelphia firemen. They know. The goats came at them with heads down and the men scattered. Sometimes a man got to the fence before they got to him and then he made a low jump. If the goat reached him first he usually made a higher jump than he could have made all by himself. The firemen are not afraid of fire, but they struck at goats and would not go back to their work until the horned beasts had been corralled.

The Bear Got the Worst of It.

Bears are funny animals. They like to play jokes, just as dogs do. They are slow except when they prefer to be quick, and they would be dignified if they were not so awkward.

A freight train in northern Wisconsin killed a bear a little while ago. The train was going rather fast when the engineer saw the beast on the track ahead, but there was plenty of time for the bear to get out of the way. The trouble was that the bear was obstinate. He was accustomed to having things his own way in the woods, because there was nothing up there except other bears to say "No" to him, and he was not going to begin giving up his place to any one. It made no difference that it was not his own place and that he should have been in the woods. He was on the track, and there he meant to stay. He didn't, though. Part of him did, but most of him went up into the air and down into the ditch, and they do say that the engine dripped bear meat for a full minute.

Button-Button.

Orientals play "button" with a fruit stone. Instead of saying "Button, button, who's got the button?" the player sings:

"Something for all, a pip for one;
Four o'clock seeds and pineapple bun;
Pewter, please, and powder run!"

As the leader shouts the last word the child who has the stone starts for the goal, which he sometimes makes without getting caught. Then he has the stone a second time.

GENTLE JANE.

Said Gentle Jane, "I heard today
Our fence runs 'round the house,
But though I've watched it I must say
It's quiet as a mouse."

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